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Created in Incorruption



The creation of Eve from the rib of Adam.
Fresco from the Church of the Resurrection, Suchevitsa Monastery,
Moldavia, Romania, sixteenth century.

Created in Incorruption

THE ORTHODOX PATRISTIC UNDERSTANDING
OF MAN AND THE COSMOS IN THEIR ORIGINAL,
FALLEN, AND REDEEMED STATES

By Hieromonk Damascene

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Through sin, this cosmos became a place of death and corruption.

—St. Maximus the Confessor¹

I. INTRODUCTION

THE consensus of the Holy Fathers of the Orthodox Church holds that man and the rest of the visible creation were physically *incorrupt* (ἄφθαρτος, without decay) before the fall of man, and that death and corruption entered the world only at the fall. This doctrine is based on a common interpretation of both the Old and New Testaments. In the book of Genesis we learn that man was made subject to

¹ St. Maximus the Confessor, *Ad Thalassium* 65; *Patrologiae Graecae* (PG) 90:740B (Paris: J.-P. Migne, 1865); cf. Hans Urs von Balthasar, *Cosmic Liturgy: The Universe According to Maximus the Confessor* (San Francisco: Ignatius, 2003), p. 185.

death and that the earth was “cursed” at the fall (Gen. 3:17–19). In the Wisdom of Solomon it is said that God did not make death and did not create living things for destruction (Wis. 1:13–14), and further that man was created to be incorruptible (Wis. 2:23–24). This teaching is repeated in the New Testament by St. Paul, where he affirms that death came into the world through man’s sin (Rom. 5:12, 17; 1 Cor. 15:21–22), that because of man the creation was made subject to “futility” (Rom. 8:20), and that the creation and man himself await deliverance from the “bondage to corruption” (Rom. 8:19, 21–23) at the General Resurrection.

The common Patristic interpretation of this Scriptural teaching finds concise expression in the theology of St. Symeon the New Theologian, who writes as follows on the incorruption of man and the world in the beginning, and on their fall into corruption:

Adam was created with an incorruptible body, though one which was material and on the whole not yet spiritual, and was established by God the Creator as the immortal king of an incorrupt world, and I mean by the latter everything under heaven and not just Paradise....²

You see then that not unreasonably do we say that all the creation was also incorrupt from the beginning, and was furnished by God after the order of Paradise, but was cursed with corruption and led into bondage when it was subjected to the futility of men (cf. Rom. 8:20–21).³

This Scriptural/Patristic teaching, that death and corruption entered the cosmos only at the fall, is a basic tenet of the Orthodox

² St. Symeon the New Theologian, *Ethical Discourses* 1.2; *Sources Chrétiennes* (SC) 122:184 (Paris: Les Éditions du Cerf, 1966); cf. idem, *On the Mystical Life: The Ethical Discourses*, vol. 1 (Crestwood, N.Y.: St. Vladimir’s Seminary Press, 1995), pp. 26–27; *The First-Created Man* (Platina, Calif.: St. Herman of Alaska Brotherhood, 1994), p. 90.

³ Ibid. 1.5; SC 122:212; cf. *First-Created Man*, p. 103.

Christian worldview. It is tied to, and indeed forms an integral part of, Orthodox anthropology, soteriology and eschatology. Because this teaching is such a crucial one, and because today’s secular worldview militates against it, it is worthy to be examined in depth. In this article we will attempt to present it in a generally chronological manner, outlining first the incorrupt state of man and the cosmos before the fall; then the death and corruption that entered at the fall; and finally the redemption and salvation of man and the cosmos by the incarnate Son of God, culminating in their final, perfected state after the General Resurrection, when death and corruption will be permanently overcome. We will further discuss how, specifically, the Orthodox Church’s teaching on prelapsarian incorruption relates to her teaching on the redemption of man and the cosmos, and on their final, redeemed condition. In conclusion, we will consider how the Orthodox understanding of the first-created world, the fall, and the future age can inform our faith as Orthodox Christians.

II. THE ORIGINAL CONDITION OF MAN

Man’s Spiritual Condition before the Fall

Before examining the subject of the original incorruption of the whole cosmos, let us begin by looking specifically at the original state of man, who St. Symeon the New Theologian says was created as “lord and king of all the visible creation,”⁴ and who, in the words of St. John Chrysostom, is “more precious to God than all creation.”⁵

According to the Orthodox Patristic cosmology, the entire visible universe was made for the sake of man, and man was made for union with God. Man was created “in Divine grace,” as St. Gregory of Nyssa

⁴ Ibid. 1.1; in *On the Mystical Life*, vol. 1, p. 21.

⁵ St. John Chrysostom, *Eight Sermons on the Book of Genesis* 2 (Brookline, Mass.: Holy Cross Orthodox Press, 2004), p. 43.

affirms.⁶ St. John Chrysostom writes that “the glory from above garbed them [Adam and Eve] better than any garment.”⁷ Likewise, St. John Damascene states that, in Paradise, Adam “had the indwelling God as a dwelling place and wore Him as a glorious garment. He was wrapped about with His grace.”⁸

The Orthodox Church understands grace to be the very energy of God, distinct yet inseparable from the Divine essence. God is wholly present in His energies. Therefore, when man was created in grace, he had God Himself within him. He was meant to participate in God’s life through the Divine energies, to be fully and perfectly penetrated by grace, and thus to attain to union with God—a union which the Holy Fathers do not hesitate to call deification (*θεώσις*).

St. John Damascene teaches that Adam was not deified at his creation, but was created *for* deification: he was “to complete the mystery by being deified through reversion to God—this, however, not by being transformed into the Divine essence, but by participation in the Divine illumination.”⁹

Man’s Physical Condition before the Fall

In the Wisdom of Solomon it is said: “God made man for incorruption, and made him to be an image of his own eternity. Nevertheless, through the envy of the devil death came into the world” (Wis. 2:23–24). As the Holy Fathers universally taught, Adam and Eve were created *conditionally* immortal, that is, if they had not sinned they could have lived forever in incorrupt bodies, partaking of the Tree of Life in Paradise, and eventually attaining to heaven as well. There was

⁶ St. Gregory of Nyssa, *On the Making of Man* 30.34; *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers* (NPNF), 2nd Series, vol. 5, p. 427.

⁷ St. John Chrysostom, *Homilies on Genesis* 16.14; *Fathers of the Church* (FC), vol. 74 (Washington, D.C., The Catholic University of America Press, 1986), p. 217.

⁸ St. John Damascene, *Exact Exposition of the Orthodox Faith* 2.11; FC, vol. 37 (1958), p. 232.

⁹ *Ibid.* 2.12; p. 235.

no necessity either in their remaining incorrupt or in their falling into corruption: their free will was the determining factor. In the words of St. Athanasius the Great:

Knowing that the free will of man could incline to either side, in anticipation He [God] made secure the grace given them, by means of a law and a place. For, bringing them into His own Paradise (Garden), He gave them a law, so that, if they guarded the grace and remained good, they might possess the life in Paradise which is free of sorrow, pain or care, besides having the promise of incorruption in heaven.¹⁰

That the first man was granted conditional immortality at his creation was affirmed in a Canon approved at the Council of Carthage in 419 and ratified at the Quinisext Council (692)¹¹ and the Seventh Ecumenical Council (787):

Whosoever says that Adam, the first man, was created mortal, so that whether he had sinned or not, he would have died in body—that is, he would have gone forth from the body, not because his sin merited this, but by natural necessity—let him be anathema.¹²

Originally, the incorrupt bodies of Adam and Eve did not have, in the words of St. Gregory the Theologian, the “coarser flesh, mortal and resistant,” that our bodies now have.¹³ According to St. Gregory of Si-

¹⁰ St. Athanasius the Great, *On the Incarnation of the Word*; PG 25b:101BC; cf. NPNF, 2nd Series, vol. 4, pp. 37–38. For further discussion of St. Athanasius’s teaching on the immortality of man before the fall, see pp. 59–62 below.

¹¹ The Quinisext Council in Trullo was held eleven years after the Sixth Ecumenical Council, and its decrees are accepted in the Orthodox Church as a continuation of the acts of the Sixth Council.

¹² Canon 109 of the “African Code”; in *The Seven Ecumenical Councils*, NPNF, 2nd Series, vol. 14, p. 496. In *The Rudder* (Pedalion) of St. Nicodemus of Mount Athos, this Canon is listed as Canon 120 of the Council of Carthage.

¹³ St. Gregory the Theologian, *Oration* 38.12; PG 36:324C; cf. NPNF, 2nd Series, vol. 7, p. 348.

nai, they were “without bodily humors”;¹⁴ in the words of St. Maximus, they did not have “the temperament which makes the flesh denser, mortal, and tough.”¹⁵

From the writings of many Holy Fathers—Sts. Irenaeus of Lyons, Athanasius the Great, Gregory of Nyssa, John Chrysostom, John Damascene, Maximus the Confessor, Symeon the New Theologian, and Gregory of Sinai—we know that, before the fall, Adam and Eve were free from the bodily needs of shelter and clothing,¹⁶ and even of sleep;¹⁷ they had no sexual relations or even sexual passions;¹⁸ there was no emission of seed;¹⁹ their eyes did not produce tears;²⁰ they partook of

¹⁴ St. Gregory of Sinai, *On Commandments and Doctrines* 8, 81; in *The Philokalia*, vol. 4 (London: Faber and Faber, 1995), pp. 213, 227; cf. 46, p. 221. In the Slavonic translation of this work, found in the Slavonic *Philokalia* (*Dobrotolubie*), the Greek word *χυμοί* (translated here as “bodily humors”) is rendered as мокроты, which means “moistures.”

¹⁵ St. Maximus the Confessor, *Ambiguum* 45; PG 91:1353B.

¹⁶ St. John Chrysostom, *Homilies on Genesis* 15.14, 16.2, 17.1, 17.30; FC, vol. 74, pp. 202–3, 207, 222, 238. St. Maximus the Confessor, *Ambiguum* 45; PG 91:1353B.

¹⁷ St. Irenaeus of Lyons, *Demonstration of the Apostolic Preaching* 13; in idem, *On the Apostolic Preaching* (Crestwood, N.Y.: St. Vladimir’s Seminary Press, 1997), p. 48; St. Gregory of Sinai, *On Commandments and Doctrines* 8; in *Philokalia*, vol. 4, p. 213.

¹⁸ St. Athanasius the Great, *Commentary on the Psalms* (Psalm 50:5); PG 27:240CD. St. Gregory of Nyssa, *On the Making of Man* 17.1–3; NPNF, 2nd Series, vol. 5, p. 407. St. John Chrysostom, *Homilies on Genesis* 15.14; FC, vol. 74, pp. 202–3. Ibid. 18.13; FC, vol. 82 (1990), pp. 10–11. St. John Damascene, *Exact Exposition* 2.11, 4.24; FC, vol. 37, pp. 231, 394. St. Maximus the Confessor, *Ad Thalassium* 21; in idem, *On the Cosmic Mystery of Jesus Christ* (Crestwood, N.Y.: St. Vladimir’s Seminary Press, 2003), pp. 109–10. St. Symeon the New Theologian, *Catechetical Discourses* 26.4; in idem, *The Discourses* (New York: Paulist Press, 1980), pp. 269–70.

¹⁹ St. Symeon the Theologian, *Ethical Discourses* 13; in idem, *On the Mystical Life*, vol. 2 (Crestwood, N.Y.: St. Vladimir’s Seminary Press, 1996), p. 167.

²⁰ St. John Chrysostom, *On the Statues* 11.3; PG 49:122; cf. NPNF, 1st Series, vol. 9, p. 414. See Panayiotis Nellis, *Deification in Christ* (Crestwood, N.Y.: St. Vladimir’s Seminary Press, 1987), p. 74.

incorruptible fruits, but did not void bodily waste;²¹ they had no afflictions, infirmities, illness, disease, physical defects, or maimings of the body;²² they knew no difficulties, sorrows, labors, sweat, hunger, or thirst;²³ they did not experience physical pain;²⁴ they were not subject to cold and heat, or to the elements.²⁵ Thus, writes St. John Chrysostom, before the fall man’s existence was akin to that of the angels:

²¹ St. Symeon the New Theologian, *Ethical Discourses* 1.1, 1.5; in *On the Mystical Life*, vol. 1, pp. 26, 38. St. Maximus the Confessor, *Ambiguum* 10; in Andrew Louth, *Maximus the Confessor* (London and New York: Routledge, 1996), p. 126. St. Gregory of Nyssa, *On the Soul and the Resurrection*; NPNF, 2nd Series, vol. 5, p. 465. St. Gregory of Sinai, *On Commandments and Doctrines* 8–9; in *Philokalia*, vol. 4, p. 213. St. Symeon taught that man needed to eat incorrupt fruit before the fall (see pp. 25–26, 88 below), while St. Maximus taught that Adam would not have lost his immortality if he had obeyed God and been nourished from the tree of life (cf. Gen. 2:9). St. Gregory of Nyssa and St. Gregory of Sinai listed feeding as a mark of the corruption that came into existence at the fall; however, both of them listed it together with the voiding of bodily waste. From the sum of the Patristic teaching on this subject, we can conclude that, while incorrupt man did eat incorrupt food before the fall, this eating was not the same as what we know today, when the food undergoes corruption and waste is excreted.

²² St. Basil the Great, *Homily Explaining That God Is Not the Cause of Evil* 6; in idem, *On the Human Condition* (Crestwood, N.Y.: St. Vladimir’s Seminary Press, 2005), p. 73. St. Gregory of Nyssa, *On the Soul and the Resurrection*, pp. 464–65. Idem, *On the Lord’s Prayer* 4.2; *Ancient Christian Writers*, no. 18 (Westminster, Md.: Newman Press, 1954), p. 58. St. Maximus the Confessor, *Ambiguum* 45; PG 91:1353B.

²³ St. John Chrysostom, *Homilies on Genesis* 17.41; FC, vol. 74, p. 243. St. Symeon the New Theologian, *Ethical Discourses* 1.2; in *On the Mystical Life*, vol. 1, pp. 27–28. Idem, *Catechetical Discourses* 5.7; in *Discourses*, pp. 96–97. Idem, *First-Created Man*, pp. 60, 91–92, 111.

²⁴ St. Athanasius the Great, *On the Incarnation of the Word* 3; NPNF, 2nd Series, vol. 4, p. 38. St. John Chrysostom, *Homilies on Genesis* 17.1, 30; FC, vol. 74, pp. 222, 238. St. Symeon the New Theologian, *Catechetical Discourses* 25.4; in *Discourses*, p. 269.

²⁵ St. Maximus the Confessor, *Ambiguum* 45; PG 91:1353B. St. Symeon the New Theologian, *Catechetical Discourses* 5.7; in *Discourses*, p. 97. Idem, *First-Created*

Up until that time [of the fall] they were living like angels in Paradise and so they were not burning with desire, not assaulted by other passions, not subject to the needs of nature, but on the contrary were created incorruptible and immortal, and on that account at any rate they had no need to wear clothes....

Consider, I ask you, the transcendence of their blessed condition, how they were superior to all bodily concerns, how they lived on earth as if they were in heaven, and though in fact possessing a body they did not feel the limitations of their bodies. After all, they had no need of shelter or habitation, clothing or anything of that kind....

Everything, you see, He [God] made and arranged so that this rational being [man] created by Him had the good fortune to be of the greatest importance, and far from being inferior to the life of the angels, enjoyed in the body their immunity from suffering.²⁶

Elsewhere St. John Chrysostom writes that, before the fall, Adam and Eve

lived in Paradise as in heaven and they enjoyed God's company. Desire for sexual intercourse, conception, labor, childbirth and every form of corruption had been banished from their souls.... At that time there were no cities, crafts, or houses.... Nevertheless, nothing either thwarted or hindered that happy life, which was far better than this.²⁷

Man, p. 60. See also St. Seraphim of Sarov, "Conversation of St. Seraphim of Sarov on the Aim of the Christian Life," in *Little Russian Philokalia*, vol. 1, 4th ed. (Platina, Calif.: St. Herman of Alaska Brotherhood, 2008), p. 90.

²⁶ St. John Chrysostom, *Homilies on Genesis* 15.14, 16.2, 17.1; FC, vol. 74, pp. 202–3, 207, 222.

²⁷ St. John Chrysostom, *On Virginity* 14.3, 5; in idem, *On Virginity, Against Re-marriage* (Lewiston, N.Y.: The Edwin Mellen Press, 1983), p. 21.

Desire and Pleasure before the Fall

Describing man's original condition, St. Symeon the New Theologian writes that

fiery lust or movement, or the irrational madness and desire of the stomach, as yet did not at all exist, but in him [Adam] was life without internal discord, and his existence was free from pain.²⁸

Elsewhere, the same Saint says that the fruits in Paradise afforded first-created man with "indescribable pleasure and enjoyment."²⁹ From these two statements it may be concluded that, in experiencing "pleasure and enjoyment" in created things prior to the fall, the first humans did not experience irrational desire for them.

According to St. Maximus the Confessor, at his creation man was supposed to direct his desire and longing not to created things but to God, and to find his pleasure (*ἡδονή*) in Him:

When God created human nature, He did not create sensible pleasure and pain along with it; rather, He furnished it with a certain spiritual capacity for pleasure, a pleasure whereby human beings would be able to enjoy God ineffably. But together with coming-into-being, the first man, by use of his senses, squandered this spiritual capacity—the natural desire of the mind for God—on sensible things.³⁰

²⁸ St. Symeon the New Theologian, *Catechetical Discourses* 25.4; SC 113:56 (1965); cf. idem, *Discourses*, p. 269.

²⁹ See p. 25 below.

³⁰ St. Maximus the Confessor, *Ad Thalassium* 61; *Corpus Christianorum, Series Graeca* (CCSG) 22:85 (Turnhout, Belgium: Brepols/Leuven University Press, 1990); cf. *On the Cosmic Mystery*, p. 131; idem, *Various Texts on Theology, the Divine Economy, and Virtue and Vice* 4.33–35, *The Philokalia*, vol. 2 (London: Faber and Faber, 1981), p. 243.

For St. Maximus, “pleasure” in its fallen context is a combination of sensual feeling and a passionate desire for a sensible object:

Every forbidden pleasure has come to be through passion aroused through the senses by some object of sense.... For desire added to sensual feeling changes into pleasure, giving it a shape, and sensual feeling moved by desire produces pleasure when it is applied to some object of sense.³¹

In the writings of St. Symeon and St. Maximus on this subject, we see two Fathers viewing the same reality from different sides. St. Symeon, in saying that man experienced “pleasure” in partaking of the fruits of Eden, was speaking of pleasure in created things *without* irrational desire for them. St. Maximus, on the other hand, in saying that man was not originally created with “sensible pleasure,” was speaking precisely of pleasure *born of* desire. From the sum of the teachings of both Fathers, we arrive at the following: in experiencing pleasure in created things before the fall, man did not turn his desire toward them, but instead kept it directed toward God, the natural object of his desire.

Indeed, according to a passage attributed to St. Theodore the Great Ascetic in *The Philokalia*, man’s enjoyment of created things was one of the ways by which he could raise his mind to his Creator in Paradise:

The first man could indeed, without any hindrance, apprehend and enjoy sensory things by means of the senses and intelligible things with the *nous* (mind, intellect). But he should have given his attention to the higher rather than the lower, for he was as able to commune with intelligible things through the *nous*, as he was with sensory things through the senses. I do not say that Adam ought not

³¹ St. Maximus the Confessor, *Ambiguum* 10; in Louth, *Maximus the Confessor*, p. 100; cf. *Philokalia*, vol. 2, p. 277.

to have used the senses, for it was not for nothing that he was invested with a body. But he should not have indulged in sensory things. When perceiving the beauty of creatures, he should have referred it to its Source and as a consequence have found his enjoyment and his wonder fulfilled in that, thus giving himself a twofold reason for marvelling at the Creator. He should not have attached himself, as he did, to sensory things and have lost himself in wonder at them, neglecting the Creator of intelligible beauty.³²

Thus, the pleasure in sensible things that man could experience before the fall was not a self-indulgent, egotistic pleasure, not an end in itself. Rather, it was one means by which man could, in the words of St. Maximus, exercise his “spiritual capacity for pleasure” and “enjoy God ineffably.”

As St. Maximus himself testified, God planned from the beginning that man’s mind would be raised to Himself by means of the sensible creation, for in all created things one can find “traces” of His majesty:

This was the peculiar plan of God’s consummate goodness: not only did the divine and incorporeal essences of intelligible things constitute representations of God’s ineffable glory, acquiring legitimately and proportionally within themselves the whole incomprehensible loveliness and inapproachable beauty, but, in addition, traces of God’s own majesty intermingled with sensible things, things that fall far short of intelligible essences. These traces of God’s majesty are able to transport the human *nous*, which uses them as a vehicle, infallibly to God.³³

³² St. Theodore the Great Ascetic, *Theoretikon*; in *Philokalia*, vol. 2, p. 44.

³³ St. Maximus the Confessor, *Ad Thalassium* 51; CCSG 7:395 (1980); in Paul M. Blowers, *Exegesis and Spiritual Pedagogy in Maximus the Confessor* (Notre Dame, Ind.: University of Notre Dame Press, 1991), p. 110; cf. St. Maximus, *Various Texts* 2.96, *Philokalia*, vol. 2, p. 208.

The Condition of Man's Mind before the Fall

From St. John Chrysostom we learn that Adam was originally created with “ineffable intelligence,” which endowed him with the capability to name all the animals (Gen. 2:19–20), and with “prophetic grace,” which enabled him to prophesy about Eve after her creation (Gen. 2:23–24).³⁴

St. Maximus provides us with further insights into the original intelligence of man, explaining that the human mind was not touched by imagination before the fall:

In the beginning, passion and pain were not created together with the body; nor forgetfulness and ignorance together with the soul; nor the ever changing impressions in the shape of events with the mind. All these things were brought about in man by his disobedience.... The mind of Adam at first was not impressed by the imagination, which stands between the mind and the thoughts, setting up a wall around the mind and not allowing it to enter into the most simple and imageless essences of created beings.³⁵

In a similar vein, St. Gregory of Sinai speaks of man's memory in the prelapsarian state:

The memory was originally simple and one-pointed, but as a result of the fall its natural powers have been perverted: it has lost its recollectedness in God and has become compound instead of simple, diversified instead of one-pointed.³⁶

³⁴ St. John Chrysostom, *Homilies on Genesis* 15.12, 15.14, 16.16; FC, vol. 74, pp. 201–3, 218. See also 14.18, p. 190.

³⁵ St. Maximus the Confessor, quoted in St. Nicodemus of the Holy Mountain, *A Handbook of Spiritual Counsel* (New York: Paulist Press, 1989), p. 150.

³⁶ St. Gregory of Sinai, *On Commandments and Doctrines* 60; in *Philokalia*, vol. 4, p. 222.

St. Maximus on Man's Original Condition

A detailed description of man's existence before the fall has been provided by St. Maximus in his *Ambiguum* 45. Explaining a phrase of St. Gregory the Theologian—that the first-created man was, before the fall, “naked in his simplicity and [in his] life without arts and skills (ἀτέχνω), and without any covering or protection”³⁷—St. Maximus writes:

So I suppose that the teacher said these things wanting to indicate the difference between the temperament of the human body in the forefather Adam before the transgression and that which in us is now seen and holds sway, because back then man clearly was not torn apart by qualities contrary to and corruptive of each other in their bodily mixture, but was accordingly without flux or efflux—and free of the constant alteration between them, depending on which quality predominates. For indeed man was not deprived of the immortality that is by grace, and did not have corruption which now whips him with its goads, but another temperament of the body manifestly befit him, a temperament held together by qualities that are simple and without strife.

For reason of this temperament was the first man naked, not as one fleshless or bodiless,³⁸ but as one not having the temperament which makes the flesh denser, mortal, and tough. According to this great teacher, the first man both lived without arts and skills (ἀτέχνως) without dissipating the natural good health given him once for all in his essence, and was without need of protective covering, fearing no shame because of his innate dispassion, and not subject to either cold or heat—for which reasons especially the means of

³⁷ St. Gregory the Theologian, *Oration* 45.8, PG 36:632C; cf. NPNF, 2nd Series, vol. 7, p. 425.

³⁸ St. Maximus is here refuting a teaching of Origenism. The Origenists, believing that man was fleshless and bodiless before the fall (see p. 23, note 40 below), were apt to falsely interpret the above-quoted phrase of St. Gregory the Theologian to mean that man was originally “naked” of flesh.

protective covering, both shelter and clothing, have been contrived for humans....

For being dispassionate by grace, he was not by way of pleasure moved by the deceitful passions of the imagination; and existing without any want, he was free of the obligation to use arts and skills because of necessity; and being wise, he had been by way of knowledge set above the study of nature.

Thus the first man had nothing between him and God which was obstructing his knowledge and which was stopping his movement toward God, movement self-chosen out of love, from becoming a kinship. And because of this, he was called by the teacher, “naked in his simplicity,” as existing above all research into nature; and with a “life without arts and skills,” as being pure of all life in need of arts and skills; and “without any covering or protection,” since he was free of such impassioned intertwining of the senses with sensible things, to which things he was justly subjected later on, when he fell short through defect—when he of his own choice preferred to become empty of everything rather than to be full, thus becoming inferior to those things to which he had naturally been superior.³⁹

From this citation it is clearly seen that, for St. Maximus as for other Holy Fathers, man lived for a time in an unfallen state, without bodily corruption and without the passions, cares and necessities associated with human life as we know it.⁴⁰

³⁹ St. Maximus the Confessor, *Ambiguum* 45; PG 91:1352D–1356A.

⁴⁰ Some contemporary scholars, citing the words of St. Maximus quoted earlier—that the first man misused his spiritual capacity “together with coming-into-being” (ἀμα τῷ γίνεσθαι; *Ad Thalassium* 61, see p. 17 above; see also *Ambiguum* 42; PG 91:1321B)—have suggested that St. Maximus believed there was never a time when man was in an unfallen state. This interpretation, however, does not concur with other portions of the Saint’s teaching. In the lengthy passage from *Ambiguum* 45 that we have just quoted, St. Maximus speaks of Adam’s incorrupt, unfallen state

St. Maximus and St. Symeon on What Might Have Been

Such was the condition of man in the beginning. By drawing ever closer to God in love, by naturally directing his desire and longing to Him rather than unnaturally turning it aside to things of the senses, man was to become ever more holy and spiritual, ever more in the likeness of God, ever more transformed by the grace of God. Earlier we quoted the words of St. John Damascene that man was “to complete the mystery by being deified.” Expanding on this theme, St. Maximus states that man, by freely following God’s commandment in Eden, would have become a deified “son of God”—a god not by nature but by grace:

In the beginning man was created in the image of God for the undoubted purpose of being born of the Spirit by free choice, and of acquiring what was in the likeness of God through keeping the Divine commandment which had been laid upon him. In this way the same

as an actuality. Moreover, by saying that this state existed “before the transgression” and that Adam’s condition was changed “later on” (ὕστερον), when he had fallen,” St. Maximus places his detailed portrayal of the prelapsarian state within a temporal framework and indicates a time lapse between man’s creation and his fall. Here it can be seen that St. Maximus’s teaching does in fact agree with the common Patristic understanding of the Genesis account.

It is likely that St. Maximus said that man misused his spiritual capacity “together with coming-into-being” in order to rebut Origenist ideas of an extended prelapsarian state and of a “double-creation” of man. (According to Origen, intelligences [νῳεῖς] were created after eternal Divine forms and contemplated God until they became “sated” with Him, at which time they “cooled down” to become souls, and God created the material bodies and sensible world into which they fell [cf. Origen, *First Principles* 2.8.3].) Viewing St. Maximus’s statement in this light, translator Paul M. Blowers has interpreted the Saint’s words to mean: “Fallenness has been the dilemma of humankind *virtually from the beginning*” (St. Maximus, *On the Cosmic Mystery*, p. 85, note 10, emphasis in the original). St. Maximus’s words “together with coming-into-being,” then, are to be understood in a relative sense, as meaning “very close to the beginning.” To interpret them in an absolute sense, as denying the very existence of the prelapsarian state, makes no sense within the context of St. Maximus’s thought, let alone the wider Scriptural/Patristic context.

man would on the one hand be a creature of God by nature, and on the other a son of God and a god through the Spirit by grace. For it was not possible in any other way for man after his creation to be proved a son of God and a god through deification by grace, unless first by free choice he had been born of the Spirit through the self-moving and sovereign power which naturally unites him with God.⁴¹

St. Symeon the New Theologian provides us with an image of what life would have been like if the first people had fulfilled their original designation. "Imagine," he writes,

... what sort of life and way of living we might have had if we had been preserved incorruptible and immortal in an incorrupt world, going through life manifestly without sin or sorrow, free of cares and untroubled. And imagine, too, how by progress in keeping God's commandments and the putting into practice of our good intentions we would have been led up in due time to a more perfect glory and transformation, drawing nearer to God and to the rays which spring from His Divinity. The soul of each would have become brighter, and the perceptible and material body of each altered and changed into an immaterial and spiritual one, into something beyond sense perception.⁴²

III. THE ORIGINAL CONDITION OF THE COSMOS

Patristic Accounts of the Cosmos before the Fall

We have already quoted briefly from St. Symeon's description of the cosmos that man originally inhabited. St. Symeon is quite explicit

⁴¹ St. Maximus the Confessor, *Ambigua* 42; in Nellas, *Deification in Christ*, p. 219.

⁴² St. Symeon the New Theologian, *Ethical Discourses* 1.1; SC 122:176–78; cf. *On the Mystical Life*, vol. 1, pp. 22–23; *First-Created Man*, p. 88.

that the entire visible creation, and not only Paradise, was in a state of incorruption before the fall of man. He writes:

God did not, as some people think, just give Paradise to our ancestors at the beginning, nor did He make only Paradise incorruptible. No! Instead, He did much more. Before Paradise He made the whole earth, the one which we inhabit, and everything in it. Nor that alone, but He also in five days brought the heavens and all they contain into being. On the sixth day He made Adam and established him as lord and king of all the visible creation. Neither Eve nor Paradise were yet created, but the whole world had been brought into being by God as one thing, as a kind of paradise, at once incorruptible yet material and perceptible. It was this world, as we said, which was given to Adam and to his descendants for their enjoyment. Does this seem strange to you? It should not.⁴³

Here St. Symeon is echoing the Wisdom of Solomon, in which it is declared: "God did not make death, neither does He take delight in the destruction of living things. God created all things that they might have their being; and the generations of the world were for preservation, and there is no poison of destruction in them" (Wis. 1:13–14).

According to St. Symeon, before the original creation was "changed over to corruption" it did not "bear perishable fruits and ... sprout thorns and thistles" (cf. Gen. 3:18).⁴⁴ Elsewhere in the same work, St. Symeon affirms that God gave man in Paradise "every kind and variety of fruit, fruit which is never spoiled or lacking but always fresh, full of sweetness, and providing our ancestors with indescribable pleasure and enjoyment. For it was fitting that their incorruptible

⁴³ Ibid.; in *On the Mystical Life*, vol. 1, p. 21.

⁴⁴ Ibid. 1.4; in *On the Mystical Life*, vol. 1, p. 38; cf. *First-Created Man*, p. 103.

bodies be supplied with incorruptible food.”⁴⁵ In other words, it was appropriate for incorrupt first-created man to be given both an environment and a food that corresponded to his condition.

According to St. John Damascene, before Adam and Eve’s transgression “there was neither rain nor tempest on the earth.”⁴⁶

Further details about the state of the creation—in particular, Paradise—before the fall are provided by St. Gregory of Sinai. Eden, he says, “has been planted by God with all sorts of the most fragrant plants.... It is always bursting with fruit, both ripe and unripe, and is continuously blossoming with flowers.” According to this Saint, Paradise has been “made between corruption and incorruption,” such that mature trees and fruit “turn into fragrant soil, and do not give off the odor of corruption as do plants of this world. This occurs because of the great richness and holiness of the grace ever abounding there.”⁴⁷

Animals before the Fall

From St. Theophilus of Antioch we learn that animals were not venomous before the fall.⁴⁸ Both he and other Holy Fathers taught that beasts did not evoke fear in man in the prelapsarian world, but rather submitted to him. As St. John Chrysostom observes, when the animals came before Adam in order to receive names, “they came in complete subjection to him as to a master and accepted the names, while Adam

⁴⁵ Ibid. 1.1; SC 122:182; cf. *On the Mystical Life*, vol. 1, p. 26; *First-Created Man*, p. 90.

⁴⁶ St. John Damascene, *Exact Exposition* 2.10; NPNF, 2nd Series, vol. 9, p. 28.

⁴⁷ St. Gregory of Sinai, *On Commandments and Doctrines* 10; in *Philokalia* (in Greek), vol. 4 (Athens, 1976), p. 32; cf. *Philokalia* (in English), vol. 4, p. 213. In quoting these words of St. Gregory, Fr. Seraphim Rose notes: “This passage is expressed in the present tense—because the Paradise in which Adam was placed is still in existence, but is not visible to our normal sense organs” (Fr. Seraphim Rose, *Genesis, Creation and Early Man* [Platina, Calif.: St. Herman of Alaska Brotherhood, 2000], p. 414).

⁴⁸ St. Theophilus of Antioch, *To Autolycus* 2.17; *Ante-Nicene Fathers* (ANF), vol. 2, p. 101, quoted on p. 52 below.

had no fear of these wild beasts.”⁴⁹ “Before the fall,” writes St. John Damascene, “all things were subject to the control of man, because God had made him ruler over all the things on the earth and in the water.”⁵⁰

As stated in Genesis 1:30, at the beginning of creation God indicated that all the animals were to eat plants rather than each other: “And to every beast of the earth, and to every bird of the air, and to every thing that creeps on the earth, everything that has the breath of life, I have given every green plant for food.” Following from these words of Scripture, the Holy Fathers consistently taught that animals were given plants to eat before the fall. Thus, St. Theophilus of Antioch wrote that animals were not predatory before the fall, and that after the General Resurrection they will be “restored to their original gentleness.”⁵¹ St. Irenaeus of Lyons taught the same: commenting on Isaiah’s prophecy that “the wolf shall feed with the lamb, and the leopard shall lie down with the young goat ... and the lion and ox shall eat straw together” (Is. 11:6–7; see also Is. 11:8–9, 65:25), he affirmed that this can be seen to refer to the state of animals both before the fall and after the General Resurrection:

It is right that when the creation is restored, all the animals should obey and be in subjection to man, and revert to the food originally given by God (for they had been originally subjected in obedience to Adam), that is, the productions of the earth.⁵²

⁴⁹ St. John Chrysostom, *Homilies on Genesis* 14.19; FC, vol. 74, p. 191. See also 16.4, p. 209.

⁵⁰ St. John Damascene, *Exact Exposition* 2.10; FC, vol. 37, p. 229. See also St. Symeon the New Theologian, *First-Created Man*, p. 92.

⁵¹ St. Theophilus of Antioch, *To Autolycus* 2.17; ANF, vol. 2, p. 101. See the full quotation on p. 52 below.

⁵² St. Irenaeus, *Against Heresies* 5.33, ANF, vol. 1, p. 563. St. Irenaeus noted that, besides referring to the original and final states of animals, this prophecy of Isaiah 11:6–10 can also refer to the harmony between formerly fierce peoples and the

St. John Damascene likewise spoke of animals eating plants before the fall, saying that then “the earth brought forth of itself fruits for the use of the animals that were subject to man.”⁵³ St. Gregory of Nyssa observed that plants were created before animals because they were to serve as food for the animals.⁵⁴ According to St. John Chrysostom, God told Adam that He had given plants for the animals to eat so that Adam, who had been placed as lord of the creation, would not be concerned about how to provide for animals.⁵⁵

The Fathers do not speak of any kind of carnivory existing before the fall. In the writings of St. Basil the Great, on the other hand, we find an explicit teaching that animals did not eat each other, and furthermore that they neither died nor decayed in the first-created world:

Doubtless indeed vultures did not look around the earth when living things came to be. For nothing yet died of these things given meaning or brought into being by God, so that vultures might eat it. Nature was not divided, for it was in its prime; nor did hunters kill, for that was not yet the custom of human beings; nor did wild beasts claw their prey, for they were not carnivores. And it is customary for vultures to feed on corpses, but since there were not yet corpses, nor yet their stench, so there was not yet such food for vultures. But all followed the diet of swans and all grazed the meadows.⁵⁶

righteous in the Church (*Against Heresies* 5.33). In the same vein, St. Cyril of Alexandria said that the prophecy in Isaiah 65:17–19 can refer both to the state of believers in the Church of Christ and to the state of the righteous beyond the General Resurrection (*Commentary on Isaiah* 5.6).

⁵³ St. John Damascene, *Exact Exposition* 2.10; FC, vol. 37, p. 229.

⁵⁴ St. Gregory of Nyssa, *On the Making of Man* 7.3; NPNF, 2nd Series, vol. 5, p. 393.

⁵⁵ St. John Chrysostom, *Homilies on Genesis* 10.11; FC, vol. 74, p. 135.

⁵⁶ St. Basil the Great, *On the Origin of Humanity*, Discourse 2.6; SC 160:242 (1970); cf. *On the Human Condition*, p. 53. Here it may be noted that, when St. Basil's brother, St. Gregory of Nyssa, says that animals had “the potential of dying” (τὴν πρὸς τὸ νεκροῦσθαι δύναμιν), presumably at their creation (*Catechetical Orations* 8),

The Unknowability of the World before the Fall

Drawing from the Scriptural/Patristic testimony on the incorrupt first-created world—its vegetation, animals, and climate—St. Ignatius Brianchaninov, a Holy Father of nineteenth-century Russia, provides us with a composite description that is remarkable in its details. At the same time, however, he points out that knowledge of the first-created world remains largely inaccessible to us who know the creation only in its corrupted state:

The earth, created, adorned, blessed by God, did not have any deficiencies. It was overflowing with refinement. “God saw,” after the completion of the whole creation of the world, “everything that He had made: and, behold, it was very good” (Gen. 1:31).

Now the earth is presented to our eyes in a completely different look. We do not know her condition in holy virginity; we know her in the condition of corruption and accursedness, we know her already sentenced to burning; she was created for eternity. The God-inspired writer of Genesis says that the earth in its original condition did not have need of tilling (Gen. 2:5): it brought forth by itself grains and other nourishing grasses, vegetables and fruits overabundantly and of superb worth. There were no harmful growths on it; plants were not subjected either to decay or to diseases;

he does not necessarily contradict St. Basil, for he does not say that animals actually died and decayed before the fall. In the context of the common Patristic teaching on the incorruption of the first-created world, and on death and corruption entering the cosmos only at the fall (of which more will be said below), St. Gregory's statement can be understood to refer to a potential that animals had before the fall, but that was not expressed in actual terms until after the fall. Similarly, when St. Gregory speaks of animals being endowed with attributes such as courage and fear “for self-preservation” (*On the Making of Man* 18.2), this can be seen to refer to qualities that God gave them in His foreknowledge, as a provision for the corrupted state of the cosmos after the fall. This interpretation of the statement is corroborated by the discussion preceding it, where St. Gregory is relating how God endowed man with the attributes of animals “by the exercise of His foreknowledge” of the fall (ibid. 17.4).

both decay and diseases, and the weeds themselves, appeared after the alteration of the earth following the fall of man, as one ought to conclude from the words of God to Adam as he was being exiled from Paradise: “Thorns and thistles shall it [the ground] bring forth to thee” (Gen. 3:18). According to its creation, there was on it only the splendid, only the wholesome, there was only that which was suitable for the immortal and blessed life of its inhabitants. Changes in the weather did not exist: it was continually the same—the most clear and favorable. There were no rains. A spring came forth from the earth and watered its face (Gen. 2:5–6, Septuagint). The beasts and other animals lived in perfect harmony among themselves, nourishing themselves on plant life (Gen. 1:30).⁵⁷

Fr. Seraphim Rose, who extensively researched the Patristic teaching on the condition of creation before the fall, stated along with St. Ignatius that we do not know “precisely what this state was” and that it is “very mysterious to us who live entirely in corruption.” “It is enough,” he wrote, “for us to know that Paradise, and the state of the whole creation before the fall of Adam, was quite different from what we know now.”⁵⁸

A similar observation was made earlier in the twentieth century by St. Barsanuphius of Optina Monastery in Russia. Once, when standing before a window at night, St. Barsanuphius pointed to the moon and said to his disciple (the future Elder Nikon):

Look—what a picture!... This is left to us as a consolation. It’s no wonder that the Prophet David said, “Thou has gladdened me, O Lord, by Thy works” (Ps. 91:3). “Thou has gladdened me,” he says, although this is only a hint of that wondrous beauty, incomprehensible to human thought, which was originally created. We don’t know

what kind of moon there was then, what kind of sun, what kind of light.... All of this changed after the fall.⁵⁹

At another time St. Barsanuphius told his spiritual children that we see only “fragments” of the original, incorrupt cosmos—a cosmos that has been shattered because of man’s sin:

The earth is a place of banishment, of exile. For criminal acts people are condemned to hard labor—one for twelve years, one for fifteen years, and another permanently, until death. We too are guilty; we have sinned before the Lord, and we’re condemned to banishment, to hard labor. But the Lord is so endlessly loving that even in this place of banishment He has left us much beauty, many delights and consolations, which are especially understood by artistically sensitive temperaments. The beautiful things of this world are only hints of that beauty with which the first-created world was filled, as Adam and Eve saw it. That beauty was destroyed by the sin of the first people.

Imagine a marvelous statue by a great master—and suddenly, like a thunderbolt, someone smashes it. What will remain of it? Fragments. We can pick them up; we can search out the neck, a portion of an arm, or the face. Indications of the beauty of the lines are preserved in these separate fragments, but they no longer produce for us the former harmony, the former wholeness and beauty. Thus also did the fall into sin of the first people destroy the beauty of God’s world, and there remain to us only fragments of it by which we may judge concerning the primordial beauty.⁶⁰

As Fr. Seraphim Rose pointed out, the nature of the first-created world cannot be investigated without the aid of Divine revelation, for a

⁵⁷ St. Ignatius Brianchaninov, *Homily on Man* (in Russian) (Moscow: Blagovest, 2001), p. 19.

⁵⁸ Fr. Seraphim Rose, *Genesis, Creation and Early Man*, pp. 415, 329.

⁵⁹ Victor Afanasiev, *Elder Barsanuphius of Optina* (Platina, Calif.: St. Herman of Alaska Brotherhood, 2000), p. 280.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 468.

different “law of nature” (in the words of St. Symeon the New Theologian) existed before the fall, and it is very likely that even the nature of matter was different.⁶¹ “The incorruption of the first-created world,” he wrote,

is beyond the competence of [natural] science to investigate.... *Then how do we know anything at all about it?* Obviously, because God has revealed something of it to us through the Sacred Scripture. But we know, also, ... that God has revealed something besides what is in the Scriptures.... St. Gregory of Sinai and other Holy Fathers of the highest spiritual life beheld the first-created world *in the state of Divine vision* [θεωσία], which is beyond all natural knowledge.⁶²

However we may regard the first-created world—whether we call it “incorrupt” (as do many Fathers) or “made between corruption and incorruption” (in the phrase of St. Gregory of Sinai)—we can say for certain that the condition of the “very good” (Gen. 1:31) prelapsarian world as revealed in the Holy Scriptures and in the *consensus patrum* is *not* the same as what natural scientists study in the fossil record, which is a record of suffering, violence, and bloodshed; of animals devouring each other; of plant and animal disease; of the deaths of all kinds of living things, including man; and, finally, of the decay (corruption) of both plants and animals. According to the Scriptural/Patristic teaching on prelapsarian incorruption, then, the fossil record must be placed, historically, *after* the fall of man.

Man's Calling to Deify the Cosmos

Although the first-created world was made incorrupt in the beginning as was man, it was—again like man—not created in its final and

⁶¹ Fr. Seraphim Rose, *Genesis, Creation and Early Man*, pp. 415, 329. St. Symeon the New Theologian, *First-Created Man*, pp. 82–83.

⁶² Fr. Seraphim Rose, *Genesis, Creation and Early Man*, pp. 418, 415–16.

perfected state. Since the visible creation was made for man, according to God's economy it was *through man* that the creation was to reach this final condition. Possessing both body and soul, man was the link between the originally incorrupt material world and the noetic, spiritual world of the angels. As he became spiritualized and divinized by drawing closer to God, man was to lead all of creation into such a condition as well. St. Maximus the Confessor writes concerning this original calling of man:

Through a life identical in every way through virtue with that of the angels, so far as that is possible to human beings, man unites heaven and earth, making the whole of sensible creation one with itself and undivided, not separated locally from him at all in any of its dimensions, since man becomes as subtle as spirit and is no longer tied to earth by any bodily weight.⁶³

Having thus united the whole of creation, man was called “to unite, through love, created nature with Uncreated Nature ... showing them to be one and the same through the possession of grace, the whole of creation being wholly penetrated by the whole of God.”⁶⁴

Summarizing this teaching of St. Maximus, Vladimir Lossky writes:

It was the Divinely appointed function of the first man, according to St. Maximus, to unite in himself the whole of created being; and

⁶³ St. Maximus the Confessor, *Ambiguum* 41; PG 91:1305D–1308A; cf. Louth, *Maximus the Confessor*, p. 158; Nellas, *Deification in Christ*, p. 212. It is clear from the context that St. Maximus is speaking here of the original calling of man, since this passage falls within an exposition on man's creation, intrinsic purpose, fallen state, and salvation by Christ. Such is the interpretation of this passage given by Vladimir Lossky in *The Mystical Theology of the Eastern Church* (London: James Clarke & Co., 1957; reprint, Crestwood, New York: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 1997), pp. 109–10, quoted in part below.

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*; PG 91:1308B; cf. Nellas, *Deification in Christ*, p. 213.

at the same time to reach his perfect union with God and thus grant the state of deification to the whole creation.... Man had only to give himself to Him [God] in a complete abandonment of love, and thus return to Him the whole created universe gathered together in his own being. God Himself would then in His turn have given Himself to man, who would then, in virtue of this gift, that is to say by grace, possess all that God possesses by nature. The deification of man and of the whole created universe would thus be accomplished.⁶⁵

IV. THE EFFECTS OF THE FALL ON MAN

The Corruption of Human Nature

Such was man's lofty original calling. But as we all know and experience every day, the first man fell from this state and brought himself and all of creation into a state of corruption and death. In partaking of the fruit that God had forbidden him to eat, man acted in a way contrary to his own nature, which had been created "very good" by God. As St. Maximus writes:

But man did not move around the Unmoved—I mean God—as his own principle in the way that he was naturally created to do; but of his own free will, senselessly and in a manner contrary to nature, he moved around the things below him, over which he had been appointed by God to rule.⁶⁶

⁶⁵ Lossky, *Mystical Theology*, pp. 109–10. See also Nellas, *Deification in Christ*, pp. 54, 57, 212–13, 219; St. Maximus the Confessor, *Ambiguum* 41, in Louth, *Maximus the Confessor*, p. 158.

⁶⁶ St. Maximus the Confessor, *Ambiguum* 41; in Nellas, *Deification in Christ*, p. 213.

With the entrance of sin through the free decision of Adam and Eve, human nature became corrupted. St. Cyril of Alexandria writes of this as follows:

The forefather [Adam], by neglecting the commandment given him, struck out against God and submitted himself to the effects of Divine wrath:⁶⁷ for he slipped down into corruption. Then was sin also driven into the nature of man; thus "many were made sinners" (Rom. 5:19), that is, those throughout all the earth.... Thenceforward pleasures and filthiness invaded the nature of the flesh, and there arose then the savage law in our members. Our nature thus became diseased by sin through the disobedience of one, that is, of Adam. Hence all were made sinners, not as co-transgressors with Adam (for they did not yet exist then), but because they were of his nature, which had fallen under the law of sin.... In Adam human nature became sick with corruption through disobedience, and therefore the passions entered in.⁶⁸

At the fall, Adam and Eve acquired a tendency or inclination toward sin, and all their descendants inherited that inclination. In the

⁶⁷ Due to common misconceptions concerning the Biblical term "wrath of God" (John 3:36, Rom. 1:18, Eph. 5:6, etc.), a clarifying note may be in order here. According to the teaching of the Fathers, references to God's wrath should not be understood in an anthropomorphic sense. St. John Chrysostom explains: "When you hear words such as 'anger' and 'wrath' used in relation to God, do not suppose there is anything human meant in them.... Scripture says God gets angry, not attributing passion to Him, but expressing by this language His punishing action, and making an impression on dense man" (St. John Chrysostom, *Homily on Psalm 6, Homily on Psalm 44*; PG 55:71B, 190B; cf. idem, *Commentary on the Psalms*, vol. 1 [Brookline, Mass.: Holy Cross Orthodox Press, 1998], pp. 95, 266).

⁶⁸ St. Cyril of Alexandria, *Commentary on Romans* 5:18–19; PG 74:788C–789B; cf. John S. Romanides, *The Ancestral Sin* (Ridgewood, N.J.: Zephyr, 2002), pp. 33–34; Vladimir Moss, *The Mystery of Redemption* (England: St. Michael's Press, 2004), pp. 113–14.

words of St. Gregory Palamas, “When Adam fell by turning aside from good to evil, no one remained [i.e., among his descendants] who was not inclined to evil.”⁶⁹

The Loss of Grace: Spiritual Death

Because of the corruption of his nature at the fall, man lost the grace in which he had been created. He became separated from God. Grace was now foreign to his nature, and so it did not dwell within him as it had before. As Vladimir Lossky explains:

There is no longer a place for uncreated grace in a perverted nature where, according to St. Gregory of Nyssa, the mind like a mirror turned about, instead of reflecting God, receives into itself the image of formless matter, where the passions overthrow the original hierarchy of the human being. The deprivation of grace is not the cause, but rather the consequence of the decadence of our nature. Man has obstructed the faculty in himself for communion with God, has closed up the way by which grace should have poured out through Him into the whole creation.⁷⁰

St. John Damascene, who as we have seen said that man was “wrapped about” with God’s grace at his creation, says later in the same work that man was “stripped of grace” at the fall:

And so, man succumbed to the assault of the demon, the author of evil; he failed to keep the Creator’s commandment and was stripped of grace and deprived of that familiarity which he had enjoyed with God.⁷¹

⁶⁹ St. Gregory Palamas, *Homily* 16.11; in idem, *Homilies*, vol. 1 (South Canaan, Pa.: St. Tikhon’s Seminary Press, 2002), p. 186.

⁷⁰ Lossky, *Mystical Theology*, p. 132. Cf. St. Gregory of Nyssa, *On the Making of Man* 12.10; NPNF, 2nd Series, vol. 5, p. 399.

⁷¹ St. John Damascene, *Exact Exposition* 3.1; FC, vol. 37, p. 267.

St. Gregory Palamas calls forth the same image:

Before the transgression, Adam shared in this Divine illumination and brilliance. He was clothed in the true robe of glory and was not naked, nor was he ugly in his nakedness, but was truly unspeakably better adorned than those who wear diadems embellished with much gold and precious stones.... Our human nature was stripped of this Divine illumination and radiance as a result of the ugly transgression.⁷²

This “stripping of grace” constituted a kind of spiritual death in first-created man. In the book of Genesis, God told Adam: “Of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil thou shalt not eat: for in the day that thou eatest thereof thou shalt surely die” (Gen. 2:17). In fact, Adam did not physically die on the day he ate from the tree. According to Patristic teaching, however, God’s words were true: Adam *did* die on the day he ate the fruit. He experienced *spiritual* death: the death of his soul. As St. Gregory Palamas writes:

It was indeed Adam’s soul that died by becoming through his transgression separated from God; for bodily he continued to live after that time, even for nine hundred and thirty years.⁷³

Elsewhere St. Gregory Palamas expounds further on what is meant by the death of the soul:

The death of the soul is when God leaves the soul and is separated from it, although in another way, the soul remains immortal. Once

⁷² St. Gregory Palamas, *Homily* 16.39; in *Homilies*, vol. 1, p. 207. See St. John Chrysostom, *Homilies on Genesis* 16.14 (FC, vol. 74, p. 216), where it is also said that man was “stripped of grace” at the fall.

⁷³ St. Gregory Palamas, *To the Most Reverend Nun Xenia* 9; in *Philokalia*, vol. 4, p. 296; cf. idem, *Treatise on the Spiritual Life* (Minneapolis: Light and Life, 1995), p. 40.

separated from God it becomes more ugly and useless than a dead body, but unlike such a body it does not disintegrate after death since it is not composite.⁷⁴

The death of the soul that man suffered at the fall did not, however, destroy the image of God in him. St. Gregory Palamas writes that the human soul

possesses the image of God inalienably, even if it does not recognize its own dignity, or think and live in a manner worthy of the Creator's image within it. After our forefather's transgression in Paradise through the tree, we suffered the death of our soul—which is the separation of the soul from God—prior to our bodily death; yet although we cast away our divine likeness, we did not lose our divine image.⁷⁵

Physical Suffering, Death, and Decay

At the fall, man's *spiritual* death—which is the separation of the soul from God—made him, in turn, subject to *physical* death—which is the separation of the soul from the body. St. Gregory Palamas writes of this as follows:

The death, however, that befell the soul because of the transgression not only crippled the soul and made man accursed; it also rendered the body itself subject to fatigue, suffering, and corruptibility, and finally handed it over to death.⁷⁶

St. Symeon the New Theologian likewise draws the connection between the “stripping” of grace that occurred at the fall and man's being made subject to bodily death. At the fall, he says,

⁷⁴ St. Gregory Palamas, *Homily* 16.7; in *Homilies*, vol. 1, p. 184.

⁷⁵ St. Gregory Palamas, *Topics of Natural and Theological Science* 39; in *Philokalia*, vol. 4, p. 363.

⁷⁶ St. Gregory Palamas, *To the Most Reverend Nun Xenia* 10; in *Philokalia*, vol. 4, p. 296.

immediately, he [Adam] was stripped of his incorruptible vesture and glory, and clothed with the nakedness of mortality. On seeing himself naked, he hid himself and sewed together fig leaves to wrap around his waist in order to hide his shame (Gen. 3:7).⁷⁷

St. Maximus explicates this teaching as follows:

In not wishing to be nourished by Him [God], the first man rightly fell away from the Divine life, and took death as another parent. Accordingly he put on himself the irrational form, and blackened the inconceivable beauty of the Divine, and delivered over the whole of nature as food for death. Death is living on this through the whole of this temporal period, making us his food.⁷⁸

As indicated in the passage of St. Gregory Palamas quoted above, physical pain and fatigue were introduced into human experience together with bodily death. We find this expressed in the Genesis account, in the sentence that God pronounces on Adam and Eve after their fall. Addressing Eve, God says: “I will greatly multiply thy pain and thy groaning; in pain thou shalt bring forth children”; and to Adam He says: “Cursed is the earth in thy labors; in toil shalt thou eat of it all the days of thy life.... In the sweat of thy face shalt thou eat bread, till thou return unto the earth out of which thou wast taken: for earth thou art, and unto earth shalt thou return” (Gen. 3:16–17, 19).

It will be remembered that, before the fall, man was given to experience pleasure in God, even through sensory things, but his existence knew no pain. According to the teaching of St. Maximus, when man misused his capacity for pleasure by making sensible things the object of his desire, God providentially affixed physical pain to sensible pleasure:

⁷⁷ St. Symeon the New Theologian, *Ethical Discourses* 1.2; in idem, *On the Mystical Life*, vol. 1, p. 27.

⁷⁸ St. Maximus the Confessor, *Ambiguum* 10; in Louth, *Maximus the Confessor*, pp. 126–27.

Because irrational pleasure entered human nature, pain entered our nature opposite this pleasure in accordance with reason.... For every suffering, effectively having pleasure as its primary cause, is quite naturally, in view of its cause, a penalty exacted from all who share in human nature.⁷⁹

Elsewhere, St. Maximus observes that, in being given over to physical pain and death, fallen man has also been given over to physical corruption or decay after death:

God, at the very moment humanity fell ... gave the body the capacity to suffer, undergo corruption, and be wholly dissolved—as was evinced when God covered the body with garments of skin.⁸⁰

The Change in Man's Physical Condition

When man fell from his original state of incorruption, his body became more grossly material. In the words of St. John Damascene, after the primordial transgression

[man] was clothed with the roughness of this wretched life—for that is what the fig leaves signify—and put on death, that is to say, the mortality and the grossness of the flesh—for this is what the garment of skins signifies;⁸¹ he was excluded from Paradise by the just judg-

⁷⁹ St. Maximus the Confessor, *Ad Thalassium* 61; in idem, *On the Cosmic Mystery*, p. 132; cf. idem, *Various Texts on Theology, the Divine Economy, and Virtue and Vice* 4.33–35, *Philokalia*, vol. 2, p. 244.

⁸⁰ St. Maximus the Confessor, *Ambiguum* 8; in *On the Cosmic Mystery*, p. 76.

⁸¹ While St. John Damascene here gives a figurative interpretation of the fig leaves and garments of skin mentioned in Holy Scripture (Gen. 3:7, 21), other Holy Fathers give a literal interpretation of them (as in the above quotation of St. Symeon on the fig leaves, and in the following quotation of St. John Chrysostom on the garments of skin). Fr. Seraphim Rose, in his book *Genesis, Creation and Early Man* (pp. 84–88), demonstrates that the Holy Fathers offered both literal and symbolic

ment of God; and was condemned to death and made subject to corruption.⁸²

In such a condition of bearing “grosser” or “denser” flesh, man became subject not only to pain, death and corruption, but also to the bodily needs we know today. St. John Chrysostom writes:

The loving God, when they [Adam and Eve] rendered themselves unworthy of that gleaming and resplendent vesture in which they were adorned and which ensured them against bodily needs, stripped them of all that glory and enjoyment they were partakers of before that terrible fall. He showed them great pity and had mercy on their fall: seeing them covered in confusion and ignorant of what to do to avoid being naked and feeling ashamed, He makes garments of skin for them and clothes them in them.⁸³

And again:

When He [God] rendered them liable to bodily necessities for the future, stripping them of the angelic way of life and its freedom from suffering, He later arranged for clothes for human beings out of sheep's fleece.⁸⁴

In another place St. Chrysostom goes so far as to say that God “re-fashioned” man's body at the fall to accord with its new condition and needs:

interpretations of certain elements in the Genesis account without seeing the two as mutually exclusive. At times the same Father will offer both kinds of interpretation when discussing the same element in the narrative, as St. Gregory of Nyssa does when speaking of the garments of skin (see his *On Virginity* 12 for the literal interpretation, and his *Great Catechism* 8 for the figurative).

⁸² St. John Damascene, *Exact Exposition* 3.1; FC, vol. 37, p. 267.

⁸³ St. John Chrysostom, *Homilies on Genesis* 18.3; FC, vol. 82, p. 5.

⁸⁴ Ibid. 18.5; p. 6.

From the [human] body it is easy to see much of the Divine providence, not only because He made it at first better than it is at present, nor because even now He has refashioned (μετεσκεύασεν) it for a useful purpose, but also because He will raise it again to much greater glory.⁸⁵

In the same homily, when discussing the workings of the human eye, St. Chrysostom writes that tears are a postlapsarian function.⁸⁶ From what has been said earlier, this may be seen to have parallels in other organs as well, for according to the Holy Fathers other bodily functions that are now considered “natural”—the emission of seed, the voiding of waste—were not exercised by man before the fall.

Sexual Procreation

In the prevailing view of the Holy Fathers, among the bodily needs that man acquired at the fall was the need to procreate sexually.⁸⁷ Thus, St. Athanasius the Great writes in his interpretation of Psalm 50:5 (“For, behold, I was conceived in iniquities, and in sins did my mother desire me”):

The original intention of God was for us to generate not by marriage and corruption. But the transgression of the commandment intro-

⁸⁵ St. John Chrysostom, *On the Statues* 11.4; PG 49:125; cf. NPNE, 1st Series, vol. 9, p. 416. See Nellas, *Deification in Christ*, p. 74.

⁸⁶ Ibid. 11:3; PG 49:122; cf. NPNE, 1st Series, vol. 9, p. 414. See Nellas, p. 74.

⁸⁷ According to Sts. Athanasius the Great (*Commentary on the Psalms* [Psalm 50:5], see below), Gregory of Nyssa (*On the Making of Man* 17), John Chrysostom (*On Virginity* 14–15), Maximus the Confessor (*Ambiguum* 41) and John Damascene (*Exact Exposition* 4.24), if man had not fallen, God would have employed a means of increasing the human race other than sexual reproduction. To our knowledge, the only Holy Father who held a contrary view was Blessed Augustine of Hippo. Blessed Augustine did affirm with all the other Fathers that Adam and Eve did not have sexual relations before the fall; however, according to him this was either because they did not have time or because they were waiting for a specific command from God (*The Literal Meaning of Genesis* 9; *City of God* 14.26).

duced marriage on account of the lawless act of Adam, that is, the rejection of the law given him by God. Therefore all of those born of Adam are “conceived in iniquities,” having fallen under the condemnation of the forefather.⁸⁸

Likewise, St. John Chrysostom writes concerning Genesis 4:1:

“Now Adam knew Eve his wife.” Consider when this happened. After the disobedience, after their loss in the Garden, then it was that the practice of intercourse had its beginning. You see, before their disobedience they followed a life like that of the angels, and there was no mention of intercourse. How could there be, when they were not subject to the needs of the body?⁸⁹

Elsewhere the same Saint elaborates on this teaching:

Why did marriage not appear before the disobedience? Why was there no intercourse in Paradise? Why not the pains of childbirth before the curse? Because at that time these things were superfluous. The necessity arose later because of our weakness, as did cities, arts and skills (αἱ τέχναι), the wearing of clothes, and all our other numerous needs.⁹⁰

The Condition of Man's Soul after Death

In addition to changing his spiritual and physical condition and handing him over to physical death and decay, man's fall into corruption also determined the state of his soul after death, making it unable

⁸⁸ St. Athanasius the Great, *Commentary on the Psalms* (Psalm 50:5); PG 27:240CD. This teaching of St. Athanasius was later repeated verbatim by St. Maximus the Confessor in his *Questions and Doubts* 1.3 (CCSG 10:138–39 [1982]).

⁸⁹ St. John Chrysostom, *Homilies on Genesis* 18.12; FC, vol. 82, p. 10.

⁹⁰ St. John Chrysostom, *On Virginity* 15.2; PG 48:544D–545A; cf. *On Virginity, Against Remarriage*, p. 23.

to partake of eternal union with God. Adam had been barred from Paradise during his earthly life, and he remained barred from both Paradise and heaven after death. After physical death, the souls of Adam, Eve, and all their posterity went down into hades, where they continued to exist in a state of spiritual death. In the words of St. Gregory Palamas:

Even after death our souls, having been deserted by God, fell to his [the devil's] lot and he dragged them down to hades, and shut them up in seemingly inescapable prisons.⁹¹

The Change in Human Nature

With man's change from incorruptibility to corruptibility at the fall, it may be said that a "mutation" occurred in his nature. As St. Maximus the Confessor writes:

In Adam, with his own act of freely choosing evil, the common glory of human nature, incorruption, was robbed—since God judged that it was not right for humanity, having abused free choice, to have an immortal nature.... The deviance of free choice introduced passibility,⁹² corruptibility, and mortality in Adam's nature.... Hence

⁹¹ St. Gregory Palamas, *Homily* 16.25; in *Homilies*, vol. 1, p. 196.

⁹² In this context, St. Maximus is speaking of "passibility" (πάθος) in the sense of suffering pain or undergoing change—particularly, degenerative change. Such passibility, being tied to corruption, came into being only at the fall. (See also p. 40 above, where St. Maximus says that, at the fall, the human body acquired "the capacity to suffer (τὸ πάσχειν), undergo corruption, and be wholly dissolved.") In other places, St. Maximus speaks of "passibility" in a different sense, as the state of being acted upon and being subject to movement. Passibility in this sense is without corruption and existed in creation even before the fall. Speaking of such passibility, which belongs to "whatever comes into being and is created," St. Maximus writes: "The passibility spoken of in this connection does not refer to change or corruption of one's power; passibility here indicates that which exists by nature in beings. For everything that comes into existence is subject to movement, since it is not self-moved or self-powered. If then rational beings come into being, surely they are also

the mutation of human nature over to passibility, corruption, and death is the condemnation of Adam's deliberate sin.⁹³

In quoting St. Maximus on the change in man's nature, we should point out that the word "nature" takes on different meanings in his writings (as in the writings of other Fathers), depending on the context. In some places St. Maximus, when speaking of man, uses the word "nature" in the strict sense—that is (to quote St. John Damascene), as "that unchangeable and immutable principle and cause and virtue which has been implanted by the Creator in each species for its activity."⁹⁴ Thus, in one place St. Maximus says that human nature does not change as a result of sin (including, presumably, the sin that occurred at the fall), since by definition it cannot change; rather, the mode or condition (τρόπος) of nature changes:

Our [nature] is manifestly merely human and in no way impeccable, because of its deviation to this side or that. This is not to say that the nature (φύσιν) is altered but that the movement has deviated; or, to speak more truthfully, that the nature has changed its mode.⁹⁵

In other places, however, St. Maximus speaks of human nature in a broader sense, as including its mode or condition. In the passage quoted earlier, for example, he speaks of "the mutation (μεταποίησης) of human nature" at the fall. Earlier in the same work, he says that "through one man, who turned voluntarily from the good, human nature was changed from incorruption to corruption," and that, because Christ

moved.... For God is the beginning and the end. From Him come both our moving in whatever way from a beginning and our moving in a certain way toward Him as an end" (*Ambiguum* 7; in *On the Cosmic Mystery*, pp. 50–51).

⁹³ St. Maximus, *Ad Thalassium* 42; in *On the Cosmic Mystery*, pp. 120–21.

⁹⁴ St. John Damascene, *Philosophical Chapters* 30; FC, vol. 37, p. 55.

⁹⁵ St. Maximus, *Opuscula* 20; PG 91:236D; *Ancient Christian Writers*, no. 21 (New York: Newman Press, 1955), pp. 56–57.

“did not subvert the free choice” given to man, “God judged that it was right for man ... once again to recover an immortal nature” (πάλιν ἀθάνατον ἀπολαβεῖν τὴν φύσιν).⁹⁶ It is only in the broad sense of “human nature,” as including its mode or condition, that one can speak of human nature “changing” or “mutating” to corruption at the fall.

The Commonality of Human Nature as It Relates to the Fall

Although the Orthodox Church does not accept the idea that we are all born into this world sharing the *guilt* of the sin of Adam and Eve,⁹⁷ according to the common Patristic teaching we are all born subject to the *consequences* of that sin. As we have seen, these include a corruption of human nature, which inclines man toward sin; an absence of the indwelling grace of God (i.e., spiritual death); the suffering, death, and corruption of the body; the bodily necessities that we know today; and a continuance of spiritual death after physical death. These consequences were passed down from the first man to his descendants because human nature is one: we are all of the family of Adam. As St. Gregory Palamas explains,

The same ancestral curse and condemnation poured out on all of us from our single forefather, as if it had sprung from the root of the human race and was the common lot of our nature.⁹⁸

V. THE EFFECTS OF THE FALL ON THE COSMOS

The Dependence of the Cosmos on Man

Man’s fall had profound repercussions on the entire cosmos as well, bringing about what Patristic scholar Fr. Andrew Louth calls “a cosmic

⁹⁶ St. Maximus, *Ad Thalassium* 42; in *On the Cosmic Mystery*, pp. 120–21.

⁹⁷ See, for example, the teaching of St. Cyril of Alexandria on p. 35 above, where it is said that, at the fall, “all were made sinners, not as co-transgressors with Adam (for they did not yet exist then), but because they were of his nature.”

⁹⁸ St. Gregory Palamas, *Homily* 5.1; in *Homilies*, vol. 1, p. 52.

disaster.”⁹⁹ When man fell, the rest of the visible creation fell into corruption along with him: death and decay were introduced into the creation. Thus, not only did man fail to fulfill his original designation of raising the creation to God, but he lowered it from incorruption to a state of corruption.

It will be remembered that, when God sentenced mankind to suffering and death after the fall, among His decrees was the statement: “Cursed is the earth” (Gen. 3:17).¹⁰⁰ This account in the book of Genesis formed the historical-narrative background for the above-mentioned teachings in the Wisdom of Solomon and the Pauline Epistles. Following from these words of Scripture, and especially from St. Paul’s teaching in Romans 8:19–23 on creation’s “bondage to corruption,” the Patristic corpus holds that, while Adam’s continued incorruption was dependent on himself—that is, on his keeping the commandment of God—the continued incorruption of the rest of creation was not dependent on itself, but on Adam’s incorruption. To put it another way, Adam was dependent on God, but the irrational creation was dependent on man (or on God *through* man) for its abiding in incorruption. It was for this reason that, when man became corruptible, the rest of the cosmos followed him.

In Romans 8:20, the Holy Apostle Paul writes: “For the creation was made subject to futility, not willingly, but by reason of Him Who hath subjected it in hope.” St. John Chrysostom, in his commentary on this verse, explains:

What is the meaning of “the creation was made subject to futility”?
That it became corruptible. For what cause, and on what account?
On account of you, O man. For since you took a body mortal and

⁹⁹ Louth, *Maximus the Confessor*, p. 64.

¹⁰⁰ In the Septuagint text, this is followed with the words “in thy labors”; in the Masoretic, it is followed with “for thy sake.”

subject to suffering, so also the earth received a curse, and brought forth thorns and thistles.¹⁰¹

St. Gregory of Sinai says the same:

It is said that when the world was first created it was not subject to flux and corruption. According to Scripture it was only later corrupted and “made subject to futility”—that is, to man—not by its own choice but by the will of Him to whom it is subject, the expectation being that Adam, who had fallen into corruption, would be restored to his original state.¹⁰²

As St. Symeon the New Theologian teaches, God did not curse Paradise, but only the rest of the incorrupt earth:

[God] wills to hold it [Paradise] out to us as a type of the indissoluble life to come, an icon of the eternal Kingdom of Heaven. If this were not the case, then the Garden, too, would have had to be cursed, since it was the scene of the transgression. However, God does not do this, but instead curses the whole rest of the earth which, as we have said, was incorruptible just like Paradise, and produced fruit of its own accord.¹⁰³

St. John Chrysostom explains that this was a fitting and just consequence of man’s sin, since the visible creation had been made for the sake of man:

¹⁰¹ St. John Chrysostom, *Homilies on Romans* 14; PG 60:530A; cf. NPNE, 1st Series, vol. 11, p. 444.

¹⁰² St. Gregory of Sinai, *On Commandments and Doctrines* 11; in *Philokalia*, vol. 4, p. 214.

¹⁰³ St. Symeon the New Theologian, *Ethical Discourses* 1.2; in *On the Mystical Life*, vol. 1, p. 28, cf. *First-Created Man*, p. 91.

He [the Apostle Paul] discourses concerning creation’s bondage [to corruption—cf. Rom. 8:21], and shows for whose sake such a thing has occurred—and he places the blame on us. What then? In suffering these things on account of another, has creation been maltreated? By no means, for it has come into being for my sake. So then, how could that which has come into being for my sake be unjustly treated in suffering those things for my correction?¹⁰⁴

Let us recall St. Symeon’s teaching, quoted above, that it was fitting that the creation supply incorrupt man with incorruptible food in the beginning. Elsewhere St. Symeon affirms that, after the fall, it was fitting that creation be made corruptible along with man, so that it could furnish man, for whose sake it had been made, with corruptible food:

[God] subjected creation to him [man], and put it under a curse so that, having been created for the sake of man who had fallen into corruption, it should itself become corrupt and provide him annually with corrupted food.¹⁰⁵

At the same time, however, it is precisely because the visible creation was made for the sake of man that it will again become incorruptible—for when the body of man is restored to a state of incorruption at the General Resurrection, the rest of the visible creation will be restored to that state as well. St. Symeon writes:

[God] willed that creation serve man for whom it was made, and like him become corruptible, so that when again man is renewed and becomes spiritual, incorruptible, and immortal, then creation, too,

¹⁰⁴ St. John Chrysostom, *Homilies on Romans* 14; PG 60:530BC; cf. NPNE, 1st Series, vol. 11, p. 444.

¹⁰⁵ St. Symeon the New Theologian, *Ethical Discourses* 1.5; in *On the Mystical Life*, vol. 1, p. 38; cf. *The First-Created Man*, pp. 102–3.

now subjected to the rebel by God's command and made his slave, will be made new, and become incorruptible and wholly spiritual.¹⁰⁶

To summarize this Patristic teaching: Since creation was made for the sake of man, it was necessary that it be created incorruptible along with man, that it fall into corruption along with man, and that in the future it be restored to incorruption along with man. It is by reason of its future restoration that St. Paul, in saying that "the creation was subject to futility," added the words "in hope" (Rom. 8:20). St. John Chrysostom, in his commentary on these words of the Apostle, explains further why there was no injustice in the fact that creation was subjected to corruption on account of man. Addressing mankind, he says:

Because of you, it [the creation] suffered evils and became corruptible, but no injustice has been done, for because of you it will become incorruptible again. This is what "in hope" means.¹⁰⁷

There is hope for the creation, St. Paul goes on to say in his Epistle to the Romans, "because the creation itself also shall be delivered from the bondage of corruption into the glorious liberty of the children of God" (Rom. 8:21). St. Chrysostom interprets this verse as follows:

What does "the creation itself also" mean? Not only you, but also that which is inferior to you, even that which partakes of neither reason nor sense perception—even this will share all good things in common with you. For "it shall be delivered," he [St. Paul] says, "from the bondage of corruption," which is to say, it will no longer be corruptible, but will correspond to the beauty given to your body. For just as when the body became corruptible, the creation itself also

became corruptible, so likewise when the body will become incorruptible, the creation itself will again correspond and follow suit.¹⁰⁸

Again emphasizing that the rest of creation follows man, St. Chrysostom explains why Christians should find consolation in St. Paul's teaching that the creation was made corruptible for the sake of man, "in hope" of future incorruption:

Do you see how man leads the way in all things, and how everything has come about for his sake? Do you perceive how he [St. Paul] encourages those struggling, and lays bare God's unspeakable love for mankind? Why do you grieve, he says, over trials? You are suffering on account of yourself—creation is suffering on account of you. Nor does he encourage only, but he demonstrates what he says to be worthy of faith. For if creation, which came into being entirely for you, has hope, much more ought you to have hope, through whom creation will come to enjoy all those good things.¹⁰⁹

St. John Chrysostom's commentary on this passage in Romans has served as a basis for subsequent Patristic commentaries, such as those of St. John Damascene in the eighth century, Blessed Theophylact of Ohrid in the eleventh century, and St. Theophan the Recluse in the nineteenth century.¹¹⁰ St. Chrysostom was not, however, introducing a new interpretation of this passage, but only expressing what had been

¹⁰⁸ Ibid.; PG 60:530D; cf. NPNE, p. 445.

¹⁰⁹ Ibid.; PG 60:530D–531A; cf. NPNE, p. 445.

¹¹⁰ St. John Damascene, *Commentary on Romans*; in idem, *Complete Works* (in Greek), vol. 9 (Thessaloniki, 1991), pp. 116–23. Blessed Theophylact of Ohrid and Bulgaria, *Commentary on the Epistle to the Romans*; PG 124:445C–449A. St. Theophan the Recluse, *Commentary on the Epistle of the Apostle Paul to the Romans* (in Russian) (Moscow, 1890), pp. 503–15. St. John Damascene's and Blessed Theophylact's commentaries on this passage were condensed versions of St. John Chrysostom's commentary. St. Theophan used St. Chrysostom as his main source, but quoted also from the writings of other Fathers.

¹⁰⁶ Ibid. 1.2; *On the Mystical Life*, vol. 1, p. 29; cf. *First-Created Man*, p. 94.

¹⁰⁷ St. John Chrysostom, *Homilies on Romans* 14; PG 60:530C; cf. NPNE, 1st Series, vol. 11, p. 444.

the common teaching of the Church. Two centuries before St. Chrysostom, for example, St. Irenaeus of Lyons set forth the same interpretation. Commenting on Romans 8:19–23, St. Irenaeus wrote that when “the commencement of incorruption” occurs at the General Resurrection, “the creation itself” will be “restored to its primeval condition”—thus indicating both the original and the future incorruption of the cosmos.¹¹¹

St. Irenaeus’s contemporary, St. Theophilus of Antioch, elaborated on this theme. In the passage of his teaching mentioned earlier, he explained why it was fitting that animals were changed at the fall together with man, and how they will one day be restored to a condition without hunting and predation:

The animals are named wild beasts (*θηρία*), from their being hunted (*θηρεύεσθαι*), not as if they had been made evil or venomous from the first—for nothing was made evil by God, but all things good, yea, very good (Gen. 1:31)—but the sin in which man was concerned brought evil upon them. For when man transgressed, they also transgressed with him. For as, if the master of the house himself acts rightly, the domestics also of necessity conduct themselves well, but if the master sins, the servants also sin with him, so in like manner it came to pass, that in the case of man’s sin, he being master, all that was subject to him sinned with him. When, therefore, man again shall have made his way back to his natural condition, and no longer does evil, those also shall be restored to their original gentleness.¹¹²

Again, a century before St. John Chrysostom, St. Methodius of Olympus and Patara commented on Romans 8:18–21, saying that the

¹¹¹ St. Irenaeus of Lyons, *Against Heresies* 5.32.1, 5.36.3; ANF, vol. 1, pp. 561, 567. See also p. 27 above, where St. Irenaeus again says that, in the Resurrection, creation will be “restored” to its original condition.

¹¹² St. Theophilus of Antioch, *To Autolycus* 2.17; ANF, vol. 2, p. 101.

creation fell into corruption for the sake of man, and that it will be restored to incorruption along with him:

For the creation was made subject to futility, [St. Paul] says, and he expects that it will be set free from such servitude, as he intends to call this world by the name of creation. For it is not what is unseen [the angelic world] but what is seen that is subject to corruption. The creation, then, after being restored to a better and more seemly state, remains, rejoicing and exulting over the children of God at the resurrection; for whose sake it now groans and travails, waiting itself also for our redemption from the corruption of the body, that, when we have risen and shaken off the mortality of the flesh ..., and have been set free from sin, it also shall be freed from corruption and be subject no longer to futility, but to righteousness (cf. 2 Pet. 3:13).¹¹³

In our own times, this common Patristic teaching has been expounded by a modern-day Holy Father, Archimandrite Justin Popovich of Chelije, Serbia. All of creation fell into corruption along with man, Fr. Justin says, not simply because the destiny of all creatures is linked to man’s, but because their destiny is *dependent* on man’s:

The fate of visible nature has, from the beginning of its existence, been under the power of the influence of man.... Organically and mystically connected with man as with a God-like creature of God, nature in the essence of its life depends upon man and always moves strictly commensurately with man. When man chose the path of sin and death as his path through history, all of nature, as the result of its irresistible inner dependency on man, followed after him (cf. Rom. 8:19–23). The fall of man was at the same time the fall of nature, and the curse of man became the curse of nature (Gen. 3:17–18).

¹¹³ St. Methodius of Olympus and Patara, *Discourse on the Resurrection*; ANF, vol. 6, p. 366.

And from that time man and nature, like two inseparable twins, blinded by one and the same darkness, deadened by one and the same death, burdened by one and the same curse, go hand in hand through history, through the abysmal wilderness of sin and evil. Together they stumble, together they fall, and together they arise, ceaselessly striving toward the distant conclusion of their sorrowful history.¹¹⁴

VI. “BY MAN CAME DEATH”

Death Is Not from God

As our study thus far has shown, the Orthodox Church, through the Holy Scriptures and their interpretation by the Holy Fathers, confesses that death and corruption exist not because God made them in the beginning, but because man brought them into the world through his sin. Besides the verses in the eighth chapter of Romans that we have already examined, other passages in the Pauline Epistles express this Orthodox doctrine. In 1 Corinthians, the Holy Apostle writes that “by man came death” (1 Cor. 15:21). Again, in Romans, chapter five, he writes that “by one man sin entered into the world, and death by sin” (Rom. 5:12), and further that “by one man’s offense death reigned by one” (Rom. 5:17).

Commenting on the latter verse, St. John Chrysostom writes:

What armed death against the cosmos? The fact that one man tasted of the tree only.¹¹⁵

St. Macarius the Great likewise teaches that

¹¹⁴ Archimandrite Justin Popovich, *The Orthodox Philosophy of Truth: The Dogmatics of the Orthodox Church* (in Serbian), vol. 3 (Belgrade, 1978), p. 792.

¹¹⁵ St. John Chrysostom, *Homilies on Romans* 10; PG 60:476D; cf. NPNE, 1st Series, vol. 11, p. 403.

Adam was placed as lord and king of all the creatures.... And so, when he was taken captive, the creation which ministered to and served him was taken captive together with him. For through him death came to reign over every soul.¹¹⁶

St. John Damascene affirms the same:

The creation of all things is due to God, but corruption came in afterwards due to our wickedness and as a punishment and a help. “For God did not make death, neither does He take delight in the destruction of living things” (Wis. 1:13). But death is the work rather of man, that is, its origin is in Adam’s transgression, in like manner as all other punishments.¹¹⁷

Providing further insights into the causality of death, St. Maximus explains that, at the fall, sin was “nailed” or “attached” to the root of human nature, thus bringing not only man but also the entire visible creation into a state of death and corruption:

What I am saying is that in the beginning sin seduced Adam and persuaded him to transgress God’s commandment, whereby sin gave rise to pleasure and, by means of this pleasure, nailed itself in Adam to the very depths of our nature, thus condemning our whole human nature to death and, via humanity, pressing the nature of (all) created beings toward mortal extinction.¹¹⁸

Elsewhere St. Maximus sets forth the same teaching on how death and corruption entered the cosmos:

¹¹⁶ St. Macarius the Great of Egypt, *Homilies* 11.5; PG 34:548B; cf. idem, *Fifty Spiritual Homilies of St. Macarius the Great* (London: SPCK, 1921; reprint, Willits, Calif.: Eastern Orthodox Books, 1974), p. 81.

¹¹⁷ St. John Damascene, *Exact Exposition* 2.28; p. 259.

¹¹⁸ St. Maximus the Confessor, *Ad Thalassium* 61; in *On the Cosmic Mystery*, p. 137.

The true word mystically explains that man—who was allotted, by the grace of the God Who made him, to be master over the whole visible world—by way of misuse turned the motions of the innate faculties of his noetic essence toward that which is against nature; and as a result, according to the just judgment of God, man brought upon himself and this whole universe the change and corruption presently ruling over both him and it.¹¹⁹

The Devil's Role

St. Maximus also speaks of the devil's role in bringing sin, and thus death, into the creation:

Through man, [sin] impels all created things toward death. All this was contrived by the devil, that spawn of sin and father of iniquity who through pride expelled himself from Divine glory, and through envy of us and of God expelled Adam from Paradise, in order to destroy the works of God and dissolve what had been brought into existence.¹²⁰

It is in light of this explanation that we are to understand the words of Scripture quoted earlier, "Through the envy of the devil death came into the world" (Wis. 2:24), as well as the following verse from the Canon of the Feast of Theophany, composed by St. John Damascene, which speaks of the devil "implanting" death in the creation:

He who once assumed the appearance of a malignant serpent and implanted death in the creation, is now cast into darkness by Christ's coming in the flesh.¹²¹

¹¹⁹ St. Maximus, *Epistle* 10; PG 91:449B; cf. von Balthasar, *Cosmic Liturgy*, p. 185. See also the quotation of St. Maximus on p. 9 above.

¹²⁰ St. Maximus the Confessor, *Ad Thalassium* 61; PG 90:633B; in *Various Texts* 4.47, *Philokalia*, vol. 2, p. 248; cf. *On the Cosmic Mystery*, p. 137.

¹²¹ *The Festal Menaion* (London: Faber and Faber, 1969), p. 369.

Is Death "Natural"?

The Scriptural/Patristic teaching we have recounted on the origin of death and corruption in the cosmos, and on the devil's place in it, forms the basis of a poetic passage by another modern Holy Father from Serbia, St. Nikolai Velimirovich of Zhicha. In a work called "Death Is Unnatural," St. Nikolai writes:

Death is not natural; rather it is unnatural.

And death is not from nature; rather it is against nature.¹²²

All of nature in horror cries out: "I do not know death! I do not wish death! I am afraid of death! I strive against death!"

Death is an uninvited stranger in nature.

All of nature bristles at this uninvited stranger and is afraid of it. For it is like a thief in somebody else's garden, who does not just steal and eat the fruit, but who also tramples, spoils, breaks and uproots what was planted. And the more it ravages the more it becomes satisfied.

Even when one hundred philosophies declare that "death is natural!" all of nature trembles in indignation and shouts: "No! I have no use for death! It is an uninvited stranger!"

And the voice of nature is not sophistry.

The protest of nature against death outweighs all excuses thought up to justify death.

And if there is something that nature struggles to express in its untouched harmony, doing so without exception in a unison of voices, then it is a protest against death. It is its unanimous, frantic, and heaven-shaking elegy to death.

If in fact death is unnatural, if it is not natural and is against nature, then a question arises: why is it so and whence does death enter nature?

¹²² As in the passages of Fr. Justin Popovich quoted above, "nature" (природа in Serbian) here refers to the created order or natural environment.

Not a single kingdom of light and life accepts death as its native. It must have sneaked into the worlds of life secretly—crawling on its belly and staying out of sight so that it would not be spotted and exposed—from some bottomless abyss where even it was too cold and lonely.

When death was behind the fangs of a snake, it was dead unto itself.¹²³ And no one in the world then knew about good and evil—only bliss existed; and nobody heard of knowledge and ignorance—there was only wisdom; and nobody knew of life and death—there was only the state of blissfully wise existence.

But because of an occasion, which is more dreadful than the most horrible nightmare, the mouth of the snake opened and the fangs full of venom appeared out of it—and death entered first-created nature.¹²⁴

Elsewhere, in his *Homilies*, St. Nikolai Velimirovich offers another profound reflection on the same theme, indicating through observable examples that death is indeed an intruder in this world:

There is a mysterious feeling that takes hold of all who stand around a dead body, a feeling that is rarely expressed, and this is shame. Not only do men fear death, they are ashamed of it. This shame is a proof—an even stronger one than fear—that death is the consequence of man's sin. As a sick man is ashamed to show the doctor his hidden wound, so all who have a conscience are ashamed to show

¹²³ A reference to the devil, who in St. John Chrysostom's words "spoke through the serpent" in tempting Eve (St. John Chrysostom, *On the Creation of the World* 6.2; in Fr. Seraphim Rose, *Genesis, Creation and Early Man*, p. 192; see also St. John Chrysostom, *Homilies on Genesis* 16.4; FC, vol. 74, p. 209).

¹²⁴ Bishop Nikolai Velimirovich, *Selected Writings* (in Russian) (Minsk: St. Elizabeth Monastery Press, 2004), pp. 410–12. Serbian original version: Bishop Nikolai Velimirovich, *Thoughts about Good and Evil* (Novi Sad: Alexander Dragolubov, 1999).

their mortality. This shame of death goes to prove our immortal origins and our immortal destiny. Animals hide themselves away when they are dying, as though they feel ashamed of their mortality. How great, then, is this shame on the part of the spiritually educated!¹²⁵

When St. Nikolai says that death is "unnatural," he is speaking from the perspective of God's original plan—His economy—for His creation. Death was not part of God's original, "very good" creation; therefore, when it entered the world, it was "unnatural." This is not to say, however, that the creation was preserved in incorruption *strictly* according to its own nature, independent of God's grace. As we have seen, the original incorruption of man was entirely dependent on God, while the incorruption of the rest of creation was dependent on God through man.

With regard to whether man was originally immortal by "nature" or by "grace," various Holy Fathers express themselves differently. As we have said when discussing whether or not Adam's nature "changed" at the fall, the Fathers sometimes employ the term "nature" in a strict sense, and sometimes in a broad sense. Thus, just as Adam's nature may be said to have changed or to have remained unchanged, according to the sense given to the word "nature," so also man's original immortality may be said to have existed by "nature" or by "grace," depending on how "nature" is viewed.

For example, in *On the Incarnation*, St. Athanasius the Great said that Adam was created mortal by nature but preserved in incorruption by grace,¹²⁶ while St. Gregory of Nyssa, in *On Virginity*, said that man

¹²⁵ St. Nikolai Velimirovich, *Homilies*, vol. 2 (Birmingham, England: Lazarica Press, 1998), p. 203.

¹²⁶ "God has made man, and willed that he should abide in incorruption; but men, having despised and rejected the contemplation of God, and devised and contrived evil for themselves ... received the condemnation of death with which they had been threatened; and from thenceforth no longer remained as they were made.... For man is by nature mortal, inasmuch as he is made out of what is not; but by reason of his

was not originally liable to death according to his nature.¹²⁷ Here again we see two Fathers viewing the same reality from different sides. St. Athanasius, in saying that man in the beginning was mortal by nature, was looking at “nature” in an absolute sense, according to which God alone is immortal by nature because He alone is uncreated, without beginning, and dependent on nothing for His unending life (cf. 1 Tim. 6:16–17: “the Lord of lords, Who alone hath immortality”).¹²⁸ St. Gregory, in saying that man was not originally mortal by nature, was

likeness to Him Who is (and if he still preserved this likeness by keeping Him in his knowledge) he would stay his natural corruption, and remain incorrupt; ... being incorrupt, he would live henceforth as God.... For God has not only made us out of nothing; but He gave us freely, by the grace of the Word, a life in correspondence with God. But men, having rejected things eternal, and, by counsel of the devil, turned to the things of corruption, became the cause of their own corruption in death, being, as I said before, by nature corruptible, but destined, by the grace following from partaking of the Word, to have escaped their natural state, had they remained good. For because of the Word dwelling with them, even their natural corruption did not come near them, as Wisdom also says: ‘God made man for incorruption’ (St. Athanasius, *On the Incarnation* 4–5; NPNF, 2nd Series, vol. 4, p. 38). A comparable teaching is found in St. Irenaeus of Lyons, *Against Heresies* 3.20.1; ANF, vol. 1, p. 450.

¹²⁷ “This reasoning and intelligent creature, man, at once the work and the likeness of the Divine and Imperishable Mind (for so in Genesis it is written of him that ‘God made man in His image’), this creature, I say, did not in the course of his first production have the liability to passion and death (τὸ παθητικόν τε καὶ ἐπικτήσιον) according to his nature or inherent in his essence” (St. Gregory of Nyssa, *On Virginity* 12; PG 46:369B; cf. NPNF, 2nd Series, vol. 5, p. 357).

¹²⁸ St. Athanasius taught that, since incorrupt first-created man was brought into being out of nothing, he would naturally undergo “corruption into nothing” if God did not preserve his life (*On the Incarnation* 4). This theology of created being—of creatures “naturally” having an end because they have a beginning—is taken up by other Fathers in other contexts. St. John Damascene, for example, writes that “angels are immortal, not by nature, but by grace; for, naturally, everything that has a beginning has an end” (*Exact Exposition* 2.3; FC, vol. 37, p. 206). According to this sense of the word “nature,” then, even angels may be said to be “mortal by nature and immortal by grace.” As St. Maximus writes: “Creatures all exist through participation and grace.... Only the Divine essence has no opposite, since it is eternal and infinite

viewing “nature” in a relative sense, according to which humanity was, *conditionally and dependently*, granted the gift of immortality by God.

In the writings of St. Maximus, we find this question viewed from both sides. In some places St. Maximus writes that Adam “was not deprived of the immortality that is by grace,”¹²⁹ and that at the fall Adam lost “the incorruptibility which had been given by grace.”¹³⁰ As we have seen, however, in another place St. Maximus wrote that Christ has made it possible for man “once again to recover an immortal nature,”¹³¹ thus specifying that man had an “immortal nature” in the beginning.

Taken together, St. Maximus’s teachings lend themselves to the formulation that man’s body was originally possessed, *by grace*, of an immortal, incorrupt *nature*. Such an understanding is possible within Orthodox theology, which sees no rigid dichotomy between grace and nature. As Vladimir Lossky points out: “Grace is implied in the act of creation itself.... Nature and grace do not exist side by side, rather there is a mutual interpenetration of one another, the one exists for the other.”¹³²

and bestows eternity on other things. The being of created things, on the other hand, has non-being as its opposite. Whether or not it exists eternally depends on the power of Him Who alone exists in the substantive sense” (*Four Hundred Texts on Love* 3.27; *Philokalia*, vol. 2, p. 87). Thus, in Orthodox theology, no created thing could *exist*, let alone possess immortality, without God’s grace.

¹²⁹ St. Maximus the Confessor, *Ambigua* 45. See the full passage on pp. 21–22 above.

¹³⁰ Idem, *On the Lord’s Prayer*, in *Philokalia*, vol. 2, p. 302.

¹³¹ See p. 46 above.

¹³² Lossky, *Mystical Theology*, pp. 121, 126. The interpenetration of grace and nature is also expressed in the Patristic teaching on the human *soul*, which, as we have seen in the passage of St. Gregory Palamas quoted above (pp. 37–38), remained immortal even after man’s fall. Thus, St. John Damascene, after listing attributes of the human soul and including immortality among them, writes: “All these qualities according to nature [the soul] has received from the grace of the Creator, from which grace it has received both its being (τὸ εἶναι) and its being by nature such as it is

In seeing the inner harmony of St. Maximus's thought on man's original immortality, we can better appreciate the harmony between the theology of St. Athanasius and that of St. Gregory of Nyssa. St. Gregory, as we have quoted him earlier, wrote that man was created "in Divine grace";¹³³ and elsewhere he described man's condition before the fall as a "pristine state of grace."¹³⁴ Thus, while saying that man was not created liable to death according to his nature, he also affirmed that this incorrupt condition was a state of grace. Likewise, St. Athanasius, in saying that man was created mortal by nature, also affirmed that man was preserved in incorruption by grace. While employing the term "nature" in different ways with regard to man, both Fathers taught the same essential points: (1) that man was preserved in incorruption until the fall, (2) that this condition was a state of grace, and (3) that if man had not sinned he would not have died.

Why God Allowed the Entrance of Death and Suffering

Although the Holy Fathers declare along with St. Paul that death is an "enemy" which is to be "destroyed" (1 Cor. 15:26), they also affirm that the introduction of death was allowed providentially by God. Death, as we have said, was not part of God's original economy for His creation; however, after the fall God used it for the benefit of man. As

(*φύσει ὄντως εἶναι*)" (*Exact Exposition* 2.12; PG 94:924B–925A; cf. NPNE, 2nd series, vol. 9, p. 31). Here St. John affirms that immortality is a quality with which God has endowed the *nature* of the soul by means of His *grace*, just as it is by grace that He has granted the soul its very existence. It is in this light that we are to understand, for example, the statement of St. Gregory Palamas that "By nature the soul is immortal" (*To the Most Reverend Nun Xenia* 8; in *Philokalia*, vol. 4, p. 295). If the soul can be called immortal by nature, it is in the sense that the nature of the soul possesses immortality as a gift from God. In the concise phrase of St. Cyril of Jerusalem, the soul is "immortal because of God Who gives it immortality" (*Catechetical Lectures* 4.18; NPNE, 2nd series, vol. 7, p. 23).

¹³³ See p. 11 above.

¹³⁴ St. Gregory of Nyssa, *On the Soul and the Resurrection*; NPNE, 2nd series, vol. 5, p. 467.

St. John Chrysostom observes, in man's fallen state death serves for the cutting off of sin:

Even though death entered as a result of sin, nevertheless such is the superiority of God, His loving-kindness and the excess of His care that He employs even this to the advantage of our race.... Is it not the final blow to evil? I mean, if someone is wicked, their practice of evil is felled on their death: "For he that is dead is freed from sin" (Rom. 6:7), that is, no longer continues sinning; if a person who is good passes on, all their works of virtue lie in safety and in a secure treasury. Does it not, on the other hand, tell me, render the living more temperate and circumspect?... You see, if despite death being what it is there is so much rapacity, so much avarice, the stronger preying on the weaker like fish, when would avarice ever come to an end if there were no death? I mean, if they are aware that they will not enjoy what they steal, but willy-nilly they will pass it over to others, and they so grieve and lament at this, when would the flames of evil desire ever be extinguished if they kept their ill-gotten gains without fear?¹³⁵

Like St. John Chrysostom, St. Gregory the Theologian sees God's love for mankind in the fact that He allowed death to enter the world:

Yet here too he [Adam] makes a gain, namely death, and the cutting off of sin, in order that evil may not be immortal. Thus his punishment is changed into a mercy; for it is in mercy, I am persuaded, that God inflicts punishment.¹³⁶

Just as God used death for the benefit of man in his fallen state, so also did He use the other physical consequences of the fall: suffering,

¹³⁵ St. John Chrysostom, *Commentary on the Psalms* (Psalm 110 [111]), vol. 2 (Brookline, Mass.: Holy Cross Orthodox Press, 1998), pp. 37–38.

¹³⁶ St. Gregory the Theologian, *Oration* 38; NPNE, 2nd Series, vol. 7, p. 348.

bodily needs, labor, disease, etc. Like death itself, these other consequences serve to humble man and bring him to repentance.

At the fall, man succumbed to the temptation of pride, expressed in the serpent's words, "Ye shall be as gods, knowing good and evil" (Gen. 3:5). All the physical consequences of the fall serve to remind man that he is not God but a created being who is dependent on God. St. John Chrysostom, in recounting the sentence imposed on Adam at the fall (Gen. 3:17–19), explains this as follows:

Behold the reminders of the curse! Thorns it will bring forth, He [God] says, and thistles, so as to give rise to great labor and discomfort, and I will ensure that you pass the whole time with pain, so that this experience may prove a brake on your getting ideas above your station, and you may instead have a thought of your own make-up and never again be deceived in these matters.... My intention in bringing you into the world ... was that you should live in a state of enjoyment and prosperity, and not be subject to the needs of the body but be free from all such and have the good fortune to experience complete freedom. Since, however, such indulgence was of no benefit to you, accordingly I curse the ground so that it will not in future yield its harvest as before without tilling and ploughing; instead, I invest you with great labor, toil and difficulty, and with unremitting pain and despair, and I am ensuring that everything you do is achieved only by sweat so that under pressure from these you may have continual guidance in keeping to limits and recognizing your own make-up.¹³⁷

Adam and Eve indeed succumbed to pride in partaking of the forbidden fruit, but that was not the only source of their fall. As will be recalled, in the primordial transgression they also turned their desire away from God and toward created things, seeking pleasure in them as

an end in itself. This too is expressed in the Genesis narrative: "And ... the woman saw that the tree was good for food, and pleasant to the eyes, and a tree beautiful to contemplate" (Gen. 3:6).¹³⁸

Thus, the temptation that brought about man's fall was twofold. In the words of St. Mark the Ascetic, "All vice in the world is caused by self-esteem [pride] and sensual pleasure."¹³⁹ Because of this, God employed the physical consequences of the fall as a twofold remedy: not only to quell man's pride, but also to dampen his desire for created things and his pursuit of sensual pleasure for its own sake. As St. Maximus explains:

Being, in His providence, concerned for our salvation, God therefore affixed pain alongside this sensual pleasure as a kind of punitive faculty, whereby the law of death was wisely implanted in our corporeal nature to curb the foolish mind in its desire to incline unnaturally toward sensible things.

Henceforth, because irrational pleasure entered human nature, pain entered our nature opposite this pleasure in accordance with reason, and, through the many sufferings in which and from which death occurs, pain uproots unnatural pleasure, but does not completely destroy it.¹⁴⁰

Physical death, of course, puts an end to physical pain and labors. Here again we see God's mercy, for in allowing the entrance of physical death so as to prevent sin from being immortal, God also prevented bodily pain and labor from necessarily lasting forever. As Blessed Theodoret of Cyrus writes:

¹³⁸ This is the Septuagint rendering. In the Masoretic text, the last phrase reads "and a tree to be desired to make one wise."

¹³⁹ St. Mark the Ascetic, *On the Spiritual Law: Two Hundred Texts* 99; in *The Philokalia*, vol. 1 (London: Faber and Faber, 1979), p. 117.

¹⁴⁰ St. Maximus the Confessor, *Ad Thalassium* 61; in *Cosmic Mystery*, pp. 131–32.

¹³⁷ St. John Chrysostom, *Homilies on Genesis* 17.40–41; FC, vol. 74, pp. 243–44.

Death dissolves this living thing and on the one hand ceases the action of wickedness; on the other hand, it saves man from further anguish, liberates him from sweat, drives away pain and sorrow, and brings the body's sufferings to an end. The Judge mixed the punishment with such philanthropy!¹⁴¹

Furthermore, in His foreknowledge of man's eventual salvation through Christ, God allowed man's body to die so that it could be refashioned at the General Resurrection. In the words of St. Gregory of Nyssa:

By Divine providence death has been introduced as a dispensation into the nature of man, so that, sin having flowed away at the dissolution of the union of soul and body, man, through the resurrection, might be refashioned, sound, passionless, stainless, and removed from any touch of evil.¹⁴²

St. Basil the Great also points to this idea, drawing an analogy between a human body that has been rendered immune to death and a pot that has been fired in a kiln, i.e., has acquired its final state:

God did not create death, but we brought it upon ourselves by a wicked intention. To be sure ... He did not prevent our dissolution, so that our weakness might not remain immortal. It is like someone

not allowing a leaky clay pot to be placed in fire [and hardened] until the weakness present in it has been completely mended through refashioning.¹⁴³

Man's death, then, opened the way to his refashioning into a better state. The actual refashioning of man, however, would occur not through the death of sinful men but through the death and resurrection of the sinless God-man, Jesus Christ. Death, the ultimate physical consequence of man's fall, would thus become a means by which God would redeem mankind from all the effects of the fall, spiritually and bodily. As we read in Holy Scripture: "He [Christ] is the mediator of the New Covenant, that by means of death, for the redemption of the transgressions that were under the first covenant, they which are called might receive the promise of eternal inheritance" (Heb. 9:15).

VII. THE REDEMPTION AND DEIFICATION OF MAN AND THE COSMOS

"Trampling Down Death by Death"

How are we to understand this mystery of man's redemption through Christ's death and resurrection? To begin our examination of this question, let us return to the teaching of St. Gregory Palamas on man's fall. As will be recalled, St. Gregory taught that, through Adam's one spiritual death, both spiritual and physical death were passed on to all men. The same Saint, however, affirmed that it is by means of death—Christ's death—that the power of death is destroyed. He explains that, as spiritual and physical death entered the world through Adam's one *spiritual* death, so both kinds of death are overcome through Christ's one *physical* death and His subsequent resurrection:

¹⁴³ St. Basil the Great, *Homily Explaining That God Is Not the Cause of Evil* 7; in *On the Human Condition*, p. 75.

¹⁴¹ Blessed Theodoret of Cyrus, *On the Inhumanation of the Lord* 6; in István Pásztori-Kupán, *Theodoret of Cyrus* (London and New York: Routledge, 2006), p. 140.

¹⁴² St. Gregory of Nyssa, *Catechetical Orations* 35; NPNE, 2nd Series, vol. 5, p. 503. Cf. St. Maximus the Confessor, who writes that that soul and body are naturally united in man "until such time as pleases the One who bound them together to separate them [i.e., in death], in view of a greater and more mystical arrangement (*οικονομία*) in the time of the expected universal consummation [i.e., General Resurrection]" (*Mystagogy* 7; PG 91:685B; in St. Maximus the Confessor, *Selected Writings* [New York: Paulist Press, 1985], p. 197).

Through the evil one's envy and the good Lord's just consent, death came into the world. Because of the devil's overwhelming evil, death became twofold, for he brought about not just physical but also eternal death....

Of necessity bodily death followed [Adam's] spiritual death, so the evil one caused our double death by his single death.... The good Lord healed this twofold death of ours through His single bodily death, and through the one resurrection of His body He gave us a twofold resurrection. By means of His bodily death He destroyed him [the evil one] who had the power over our souls and bodies in death, and rescued us from his tyranny over both.¹⁴⁴

Out of His infinite love for us, Christ died on our behalf that we could be given eternal life, both of soul and of body. In the words of St. Paul: "God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us" (Rom. 5:8); and, "But we see Jesus, Who was made a little lower than the angels for the suffering of death, crowned with glory and honor; that He by the grace of God should taste death for every man" (Heb. 2:9).

Speaking of the awesome mystery of His redemption of the world, Christ told His disciples: "The Son of Man came ... to give His life as a ransom for many" (Matt. 20:28).¹⁴⁵ This image of Christ giving up His life as a ransom was later taken up by the Apostle Paul (e.g., "Christ Jesus, Who gave Himself a ransom for all"—1 Tim. 2:5–6) and by the Orthodox Holy Fathers. In the following passage, St. John

¹⁴⁴ St. Gregory Palamas, *Homily* 16.1, 25; in *Homilies*, vol. 1, pp. 180, 196.

¹⁴⁵ Christ's divine foreknowledge that His death would serve for man's salvation finds expression elsewhere in the Gospels. Speaking of His death on the Cross, Christ said, "But I have a baptism to be baptized with; and how I am straitened till it be accomplished!" (Luke 12:50); "As Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of Man be lifted up, that whosoever believeth in Him should not perish, but have eternal life" (John 3:14–15); and, on the day before His crucifixion, "Now is My soul troubled; and what shall I say? 'Father, save Me from this hour'? But for this cause came I unto this hour" (John 12:27).

Damascene makes use of this image, adding to it the image of Christ's body as bait attached to the hook of Divinity:

Since our Lord Jesus Christ was without sin ("For He committed no sin, He Who took away the sin of the world, nor was there any deceit found in His mouth" [cf. Is. 53:9, John 1:29]), He was not subject to death, since death came into the world through sin (cf. Rom. 5:12). He dies, therefore, because He took on Himself death on our behalf, and He makes Himself an offering to the Father for our sakes. For we had sinned against Him, and it was meet that He should receive a ransom for us, and that we should thus be delivered from the condemnation. God forbid that the blood of the Lord should have been offered to the tyrant [i.e., the devil]. Wherefore death approaches, and swallowing up the body as a bait is transfixed on the hook of Divinity, and after tasting of a sinless and life-giving body, perishes, and brings up again all whom of old he had swallowed up. For just as darkness disappears on the introduction of light, so is death repulsed before the assault of life, and brings life to all, but death to the destroyer.¹⁴⁶

In the precisely same vein, St. Gregory Palamas writes:

The Lord patiently endured for our sake a death He was not obliged to undergo, to redeem us, who were obliged to suffer death, from servitude to the devil and death, by which I mean death both of the soul and of the body, temporary and eternal. Since He gave His Blood, which was sinless and therefore guiltless, as a ransom for us who were liable to punishment because of our sins, He redeemed us from our guilt. He forgave our sins, tore up the record of them on the Cross and delivered us from the devil's tyranny (cf. Col. 2:14–15). The devil was caught by the bait. It was as if he opened his

¹⁴⁶ St. John Damascene, *Exact Exposition* 3.27; NPNF, 2nd Series, vol. 9, p. 72.

mouth and hastened to pour out for himself our ransom, the Master's Blood, which was not only guiltless but full of Divine power. Then instead of being enriched by it he was strongly bound and made an example in the Cross of Christ.¹⁴⁷

St. John Chrysostom further highlights this teaching with an image of his own:

It is as if, at a session of a court of justice, the devil should be addressed as follows: "Granted that you destroyed all men because you found them guilty of sin; but why did you destroy Christ? Is it not very evident that you did so unjustly? Well then, through Him the whole world will be vindicated."¹⁴⁸

From these and other Patristic expositions based in Scripture, the Orthodox doctrine of man's redemption through Christ's death and resurrection might be briefly stated as follows: Death is the consequence of sin. When Christ died on the Cross, He took upon Himself this consequence. However, since He was wholly without sin He was undeserving of death, and since He was Divine He was unable to be held in the bonds of death and hades. Thus, the spiritual and physical death that had entered the world through the primordial transgression were abolished through Christ's death and resurrection, and all mankind was given the possibility of being delivered from them.

¹⁴⁷ St. Gregory Palamas, *Homily* 16.31; in *Homilies*, vol. 1, pp. 200–201.

¹⁴⁸ St. John Chrysostom, *Commentary on the Gospel of St. John* 67; FC, vol. 41 (1959), p. 232. Cf. 1 Pet. 3:18: "For Christ also hath once suffered for sins, the just for the unjust, that He might bring us to God, being put to death in the flesh, but quickened by the Spirit," as well as the following verse from the service for the feast of the Exaltation of the Cross: "The curse of a just condemnation is loosed by the unjust punishment inflicted on the just [i.e., Christ]" (sticheron on "Lord I have cried," in *The Festal Menaion*, p. 134).

The Commonality of Human Nature as It Relates to Redemption

The consequences of Christ's redemptive work could pass to all men because—as we have noted concerning the consequences of the first Adam's sin—human nature is one. The Apostle Paul writes: "If by one man's offense death reigned by one [that is, Adam], much more they which receive abundance of grace and of the gift of righteousness shall reign in life by one, Jesus Christ" (Rom. 5:17). St. John Chrysostom comments on this verse and on those before and after it, explaining why St. Paul repeats the word "one" many times in his exposition of redemption:

How did death reign? "After the similitude of Adam's transgression, who is a type (τύπος) of Him Who was to come" (Rom. 5:14). Now this is why Adam is a type of Christ.¹⁴⁹ "How a type?" it will be said. In that, as the former became to those who were sprung from him (although they had not eaten of the tree) the cause of that death which by his eating was introduced, thus also did Christ become to those sprung from Him (even though they had not wrought righteousness)

¹⁴⁹ The fact that St. Paul, and after him St. John Chrysostom, saw Adam as a "type" (figure) of Christ does not of course imply that they did not also see him as a real person. The Orthodox Church has always viewed certain Old Testament figures and events as "types" of the New Testament dispensation while also affirming their historical reality. Thus, in another place, St. Paul wrote concerning certain events in the Old Testament: "Now all these things happened to them as types, and they were written for our admonition" (1 Cor. 10:11). In saying that these events *happened* as types and then were written down (rather than being merely "written down as types"), St. Paul is affirming that typology exists first of all in historical events, and then also in the written word.

The Holy Fathers saw "types" of Christ not only in Adam but also in Abel, Isaac, Joseph, Moses, Joshua the son of Nun, David and others, at the same time regarding them as real people and the Old Testament accounts of them as historical. In his *Commentary on the Psalms*, St. John Chrysostom wrote on the need to uphold the historical meaning of Scripture when a typological meaning is also given (*Commentary on the Psalms* [Psalm 9], vol. 1, p. 185).

the Provider of that righteousness which through His Cross He graciously bestowed on us all. For this reason, at every turn he keeps to the “one,” and is continually bringing it before us, when he says, “As by one man sin entered into the world” (Rom. 5:12); and, “If through the offense of one many be dead” (5:15); and, “Not as it was by one that sinned, so is the gift” (5:16); and, “The judgment was by one to condemnation” (5:18); and again, “If by one (or, the one) man’s offense death reigned by one” (5:17); and “Therefore as by the offense of one” (5:18). And again, “As by one man’s disobedience many (or, the many) were made sinners” (5:19). And so he does not let go of the “one,” so that when the Jew says to you, “How came it that by the well-doing of this one Person, Christ, the world was saved?” you might be able to say to him, “How came it that by the disobedience of this one person, Adam, the world was condemned?”¹⁵⁰

St. Cyril of Alexandria speaks specifically on how the consequences of Christ’s death on the Cross, like the consequences of Adam’s fall, were able to pass to all men due to the unity of human nature:

We were crucified with Christ at the moment when His flesh was crucified, because it somehow included universal human nature in itself, just as universal human nature contracted the sickness of the curse in Adam at the same time that he incurred the curse.¹⁵¹

The Order of Redemption (I): Spiritual Resurrection

In Christ’s incarnation, death and resurrection, *all* the consequences of the fall are overcome. These consequences, however, are not overcome all at once, but in a certain order, corresponding to the order

in which man first experienced them. St. Symeon the New Theologian teaches that, just as Adam experienced first spiritual death and later physical death, so likewise Christ first overcame spiritual death in His own Person when He “resurrected up, brought to life, and deified” the human soul at His incarnation, and then He later overcame physical death in His Person at His resurrection.¹⁵² St. Symeon goes on to say that the same order of redemption—first of the soul and then of the body—was observed in those who had died before Christ; for, immediately after Christ’s death and while His body lay in the tomb, His soul “descended into hades, freed the souls of the saints held captive there in everlasting bonds, raised them up, and established them in a place of rest and of light without evening—but not yet their bodies, for those He allowed to remain in the grave until the General Resurrection.”¹⁵³

Finally, St. Symeon teaches, this order of redemption is also observed in the life of each Christian. Man is first spiritually resurrected in the Church through the Holy Mysteries that have been made possible through Christ’s redemptive work, and only later does he experience the physical resurrection that Christ has also made possible.

“The beginning of our renewal,” writes St. Gregory Palamas, is the Mystery of Holy Baptism, wherein we are cleansed of sin through Christ’s sacrifice on the Cross. St. Gregory writes:

Christ tore up the handwriting of our transgressions on the Cross and made guiltless all those who were buried with Him through Baptism.¹⁵⁴

¹⁵² St. Symeon the New Theologian, *Ethical Discourses* 1.3; SC 122:200; cf. *On the Mystical Life*, vol. 1, p. 33; *First-Created Man*, p. 98.

¹⁵³ Ibid.; SC 122:200; cf. *On the Mystical Life*, vol. 1, p. 33; *First-Created Man*, p. 99. This teaching is found in the epistles of Sts. Peter and Paul (1 Pet. 3:18–19, 4:6; Ephesians 4:8–10). St. John Damascene affirms that the Savior began His descent into hell “as soon as [He] said, ‘It is finished’ (John 19:30), and darkness had covered the earth” (St. John Damascene, *Homily on Holy Saturday* 26; PG 96:625D–628A).

¹⁵⁴ St. Gregory Palamas, *Homily* 16.35; in *Homilies*, vol. 1, p. 204.

¹⁵⁰ St. John Chrysostom, *Homilies on Romans* 10; PG 60:475BC; cf. NPNE, 1st Series, vol. 11, p. 402.

¹⁵¹ St. Cyril of Alexandria, *Commentary on Romans*; PG 74:796; in *Ancient Christian Commentary on Scripture, New Testament*, vol. 6 (Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity Press, 1998), p. 159.

In Baptism, we die and are buried with Christ, thus partaking of the saving power of His death which frees us from sin. Thus, the Apostle Paul writes: "Know ye not, that as many of us as were baptized into Christ were baptized into His death? Therefore we are buried with Him by baptism into death.... Our old man is crucified with Him, that the body of sin might be destroyed" (Rom. 6:3–4, 6). As St. John Chrysostom explains:

Baptism is the Cross.¹⁵⁵ What the Cross and burial is to Christ, Baptism has been to us, even if not in the same respects. For He died Himself and was buried in the flesh, but we have done both to sin.¹⁵⁶

The Mystery of Baptism, however, does not only mean dying with Christ; it also means rising with Him and being given new life. The Apostle Paul affirms: "Therefore we are buried with him by Baptism into death, that like as Christ was raised up from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life.... Now if we be dead with Christ, we believe that we shall also live with Him" (Rom. 6:4, 8). And again: "Buried with Him in baptism, ... ye are risen with Him through faith in the operation of God, Who hath raised Him from the dead. And you, being dead in your sins and the uncircumcision of your flesh, hath He made alive together with Him, having forgiven you all trespasses, having wiped out the handwriting of requirements that was against us, which was contrary to us, and took it out of the way, nailing it to His Cross" (Col. 2:12–14).

This spiritual resurrection in Christ is the uniting of man's soul once again with the grace of the Holy Spirit. Because man is cleansed

¹⁵⁵ Elsewhere St. John Chrysostom observes that "not only is Baptism called the Cross, but the Cross is called Baptism. 'With the baptism that I am baptized with shall ye be baptized' (Mark 10:39), said Christ; and again: 'But I have a baptism to be baptized with' which ye know not (Luke 12:50)" (*Commentary on the Gospel of St. John* 25.2; cf. NPNE, 1st Series, vol. 14, p. 89).

¹⁵⁶ St. John Chrysostom, *Homilies on Romans* 10; NPNE, 1st Series, vol. 11, p. 405.

of sin in Holy Baptism through Christ's redemptive sacrifice, grace is no longer foreign to his nature, and he becomes a fit receptacle of the Holy Spirit. Thus, in the Mystery of Baptism, together with the Mystery of Chrismation that follows upon it, man receives the grace of the Holy Spirit as he had it before the primordial fall. In the words of St. John Chrysostom:

This is the meaning of "the Spirit giveth life" (2 Cor. 3:6).... In Baptism the sins are buried, the former things are blotted out, and man is made alive, the entire grace written upon his heart as it were a tablet. Consider then how high is the dignity of the Spirit.¹⁵⁷

St. Symeon the New Theologian explains how Baptism, together with Chrismation, is both a death and a resurrection for man, both granting man forgiveness of sins and imparting to him the grace of the Holy Spirit that he had lost at the fall:

The Son and Word of God, having become incarnate, offered Himself in the flesh as a sacrifice to the Divinity of the Father, and of the Son Himself, and of the Holy Spirit, in order that the first transgression of Adam might be benevolently forgiven for the sake of this great and fearful work, that is, for the sake of this sacrifice of Christ, and in order that by its power there might be performed another new birth and re-creation of man in Holy Baptism, in which we also are cleansed by water mingled with the Holy Spirit. From that time people are baptized in water, are immersed in it and taken out from it three times, in the image of the three-day burial of the Lord, and after they die in it to this whole evil world, in the third bringing out from it they are already alive, as if resurrected from the dead, that is, their souls are brought to life and again receive the grace of the Holy Spirit as Adam had it before the transgression. Then they are

¹⁵⁷ St. John Chrysostom, *Homilies on Second Corinthians* 6.2; NPNE, 1st Series, vol. 12, p. 307.

anointed with Holy Myrrh, and by means of it are anointed with Jesus Christ, and are fragrant in a way above nature.¹⁵⁸

St. Symeon then writes of how those who are baptized and chrismated into Christ's Church are united to God through the Holy Eucharist:

Having become in this way worthy of being associates of God, they taste His Flesh and drink His Blood, and by means of the sanctified bread and wine become of one Body and Blood with God Who was incarnate and offered Himself as a sacrifice.¹⁵⁹

In a similar vein, St. Nicholas Cabasilas speaks of how we partake of Christ's redemptive sacrifice on the Cross when receiving Holy Communion:

Since, therefore, the Only Begotten Son has left nothing undone which pertains to the Father's glory, He alone "has broken down the middle wall of division" (Eph. 2:14) and clears man from his indictment.... Christ's Body then is the only medicine against sin and His Blood the only ransom from offenses.... This is the Body that was slain upon the Cross.... In its "witness before Pontius Pilate" it "made a good confession" (cf. 1 Tim. 6:13): it paid the penalty of death for this confession, and that upon the Cross.... The Blood springing out of the wounds darkened the sun and shook the earth; it hallowed the air and washed the whole world clean of the filth of sin.¹⁶⁰

Therefore, concludes St. Nicholas,

¹⁵⁸ St. Symeon the New Theologian, *First-Created Man*, pp. 46–47.

¹⁵⁹ Ibid., p. 47.

¹⁶⁰ St. Nicholas Cabasilas, *The Life in Christ*; PG 150:589C–592A; in idem, *The Life in Christ* (Crestwood, N.Y.: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 1974), p. 120.

The labors and tears of those who repent of sins after the baptismal washing and plead for grace stand in need of the Blood of the New Covenant and of the Body which was slain, since they [the labors and tears] are of no avail without them [the Body and Blood].¹⁶¹

Elsewhere St. Nicholas affirms that, in the Holy Eucharist, we also partake of Christ's resurrection, since "we receive the Risen One Himself ... the very Benefactor Himself, the very Temple whereon is founded the whole compass of graces."¹⁶²

Spiritual resurrection in Christ—the uniting of man's soul with Divine grace—reopens the way to deification which had been closed to man at the fall. Throughout their lives, Orthodox Christians are to grow toward a more full deification, a more perfect participation in God's life. This participation in God is never to end, but passes into everlasting spiritual life in the Kingdom of Heaven.

As will be remembered, mankind had been cut off from both Paradise and heaven at the fall. Now, through Christ, both have been opened again to man. When parted from the body at death, the souls of those redeemed by Christ not only pass to Paradise, which St. John Damascene describes as "luxuriant with ever-blooming plants, filled with fragrance, flooded with light";¹⁶³ but they also pass to heaven, the place in which the angelic powers dwell,¹⁶⁴ and which is also described as a place filled with light. Thus, as St. Gregory of Nyssa proclaims, through Christ's redemptive work

Paradise, even heaven itself, is accessible to man; and the creation, both of the world and above the world, which long ago was set at variance with itself, is fit together in friendship; and we men are

¹⁶¹ Ibid.; PG 150:592AB; cf. *The Life in Christ* (1974), p. 121.

¹⁶² Ibid.; PG 150:581A; in *The Life in Christ* (1974), p. 113; cf. Nellas, *Deification in Christ*, p. 126.

¹⁶³ St. John Damascene, *Exact Exposition* 2.11; FC, vol. 37, p. 230.

¹⁶⁴ Ibid. 2.3; p. 206.

made to join in the angels' song, offering the worship of their praise to God.¹⁶⁵

These blessed realms were opened to man right after Christ's death and even before His bodily resurrection; for, as we have seen, it was then that Christ delivered the righteous from hades and raised them to "a place of rest and of light."¹⁶⁶ As St. Nicholas Cabasilas explains, He freed them from spiritual death by means of His bodily death:

When it was necessary that the captives of hades be set free, He [Christ] did not entrust this work to angels or archangels, but He Himself descended into that prison. Since it was fitting that the captives should not receive freedom gratuitously, but by being ransomed, He set them free by shedding His blood.¹⁶⁷

Thus, as St. John Damascene declares: "By nothing else except the Cross of our Lord Jesus Christ has ... hades been plundered ... [and] the gates of Paradise opened."¹⁶⁸ The same teaching is proclaimed in the Divine services of the Orthodox Church, as for example in the Kontakion for the Sunday of the Cross (the Third Sunday of Great Lent), composed by St. Theodore the Studite:

No longer does the flaming sword (cf. Gen. 3:24) guard the gate of Eden, for it has been miraculously quenched by the wood of the Cross. The sting of death and the victory of hades have been abolished, for Thou didst come, my Savior, crying to those in hades, "Enter again into Paradise."¹⁶⁹

One of the first to be raised to Paradise was a person who was clearly unworthy, but who nevertheless believed in Christ and was thereby redeemed through His death. This was the repentant thief crucified along with Christ, to whom Christ said, "Today shalt thou be with Me in Paradise" (Luke 23:43). Also among those who were brought to Paradise and heaven were Adam and Eve, who, in the Orthodox icon of the "harrowing of hell," are depicted being pulled out of the dark regions by Christ.

The Order of Redemption (II): Physical Resurrection

What we have described is only the first kind of resurrection—spiritual resurrection—that has been made possible by Christ. The second kind—physical resurrection—will occur at the Second Coming through the saving power of Christ's resurrection.

This accords with the order of redemption outlined by St. Symeon above. As St. Symeon points out, while Christians are spiritually reborn and united with God in the Church, they still experience physical death and corruption. In the case of some saints, however, God grants a certain relative incorruption to their bodies after death:

Like iron burning in the fire partakes of the latter's brilliance and loses its dark coloring, then, when taken away from the forge, turns cold and dark again, so in fact do the bodies of the saints, by the grace united to their souls, partake of the Divine fire, and are sanctified, and burn incandescent, and become themselves translucent, and are restored as more excellent, more precious by far, than other bodies. When, though, the soul departs and is separated from the body of the saint, [his body] is immediately given over to corruption and begins shortly to dissolve. But still, such bodies may remain for many years, neither wholly incorrupt nor again quite corrupted, but keeping yet the indications each of corruption and

¹⁶⁵ St. Gregory of Nyssa, *A Sermon for the Feast of the Lights*; PG 46:600AB; cf. NPNE, 2nd Series, vol. 5, p. 524.

¹⁶⁶ See p. 73 above.

¹⁶⁷ St. Nicholas Cabasilas, *The Life in Christ* (1974), pp. 142–43.

¹⁶⁸ St. John Damascene, *Exact Exposition* 4.11; PG 94:1128D–1129A; cf. NPNE, 2nd Series, vol. 9, p. 80.

¹⁶⁹ Cf. *The Lenten Triodion* (London: Faber and Faber, 1978), pp. 342–43.

incorruption, being preserved for the final resurrection when they shall be made perfectly new and incorruptible.¹⁷⁰

St. Symeon then asks why this is: that is, why, when the saints have already been granted spiritual resurrection by God, must they wait to be granted physical resurrection? In answering this question, St. Symeon harkens back to the original creation, when the incorrupt cosmos was made for incorrupt man to dwell in. Having already established that man's condition must correspond with that of his environment, St. Symeon observes that man cannot be restored to perfect physical incorruption until the rest of creation is raised to that state as well:

It was not fitting that men's bodies should be restored and made incorruptible before the renewal of all the creation. Instead, just as the created world was first brought into existence as incorrupt, and then later, man, so again it is creation which must first be transformed from corruption into incorruption.¹⁷¹

It is in the General Resurrection that all the fruits of Christ's incarnation, death and resurrection are to be fully revealed. At that time, because Christ arose from the dead, becoming the "firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep" (1 Cor. 15:20), the unnatural separation of the soul from the body at death, which began at the fall, will be overcome for all mankind, and man will experience everlasting physical life in bodies that have been made once again incorruptible.¹⁷² "The dead

¹⁷⁰ St. Symeon the New Theologian, *Ethical Discourses* 1.3; SC 122:202–4; cf. *On the Mystical Life*, vol. 1, p. 34; *First-Created Man*, pp. 99–100.

¹⁷¹ Ibid.; *On the Mystical Life*, vol. 1, p. 35; cf. *First-Created Man*, p. 100.

¹⁷² While all people will be raised in incorruptible and immortal bodies, not all will enjoy everlasting blessedness. Those who receive Christ's gift of salvation will be resurrected unto eternal life, as Christ says; while those who reject it will be resurrected unto damnation (cf. John 5:29). St. Nicholas Cabasilas elucidates this as

shall be raised incorruptible," writes the Apostle Paul, "and we shall be changed" (1 Cor. 15:52). Moreover, as we have discussed earlier, the entire visible creation will be re-created and become incorruptible along with man, since it exists for man's sake.

The Restoration of Incorruption

Adam, it will be remembered, was supposed to raise the first-created world closer to God through his own spiritual ascent to God. Adam failed in this purpose. Not only did he fail to raise up the creation to God, but through his sin he also brought the incorrupt creation down into corruption. Therefore, the Second Adam—Jesus Christ—came to restore what the first Adam had lost: He came to restore man to the communion with God and to the incorruption in which he lived before the fall, and to restore the entire cosmos to its former state of incorruption.

In the passage from Romans that we have discussed earlier, St. Paul writes of the future age of the renewed, incorrupt creation which will come into being after the General Resurrection: "I reckon that the sufferings of the present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed in us. For the earnest expectation of the creation eagerly waiteth for the manifestation of the sons of God [i.e., those redeemed by Christ]. For the creation was made subject to futility, not willingly, but because of Him [God] Who subjected it [to futility] in hope [i.e., in hope of the General Resurrection]. Because the

follows: "The Resurrection is the restoration of [human] nature. Such things God gives freely, for just as He forms us without us willing it, so He forms us anew though we have contributed nothing to it. On the other hand, the Kingdom and the vision of God and union with Christ are joys which depend on willingness. They are thus possible only for those who have been willing to receive them and have loved them and longed for them. For such it is fitting that they should enjoy the presence of the things for which they longed; for the unwilling it is impossible.... One need not therefore marvel that while all will live in immortality, it is not all who will live in blessedness" (St. Nicholas Cabasilas, *The Life in Christ* 2; PG 150:541CD, 544A; cf. *The Life in Christ* [1974], pp. 81–82).

creation itself also shall be delivered from the bondage of corruption into the glorious liberty of the children of God. For we know that the whole creation groaneth and travaileth in pain together until now. And not only the creation, but ourselves also, which have the firstfruits of the Spirit, even we ourselves groan within ourselves, waiting for the adoption, that is, the redemption of our body" (Rom. 8:18–23).

Archimandrite Justin Popovich, setting forth the common Patristic interpretation of these words of the Apostle Paul, asserts that the liberation of creation from corruption will mark the beginning of the new heaven and new earth spoken of by the Apostles Peter and John (cf. 2 Pet. 3:13; Apoc. 21:1):

By his primordial sin, man carried all of nature along after him, and surrendered it to slavery to sin and death, and the whole Divinely fashioned creation unceasingly sighs and mourns over this, awaiting its liberation from sin and death, which the Lord Jesus will grant on the last day, transforming it by His Divine-human economy of salvation into a new heaven and a new earth, "wherein dwelleth righteousness" (2 Pet. 3:13). The Christ-yearning seer of mysteries, the Apostle of the apocalyptic end of the world and of the transfiguration of creation, St. John the Theologian, was made worthy of a special revelation of God to see the future new heaven and new earth.... "And I saw," he says, "a new heaven and a new earth: for the first heaven and the first earth were passed away" (Apoc. 21:1; cf. Is. 65:17, 66:22).¹⁷³

Fr. Justin further bears witness that the deliverance of the visible creation will mark its *restoration* to the incorruption and beauty that belonged to it before the fall, and that this will occur by reason of God's restoration of man to his primordial state:

Since on the Last Day sin and death will be abolished by the coming of Christ the Lord, all of nature will also be freed from slavery to sin and death; it will be transformed and will begin to shine with its primordial [or original], pleasing, sinless, and immortal beauty. The resurrection of the dead will be the end of death not only for people, but for all visible nature, which had been subjected to death and corruption due to the sin-loving will of its haughty lord, man (cf. Rom. 8:20). Sin, evil, sickness, death—all these are the fetid, alien sediments of man, with which he soiled and disfigured the sinless face of nature. But the Lord Jesus, by the light of His coming, will wash away all this from the beautiful face of God-created and Divinely woven nature, and it will again begin to shine in its sinless goodness and ineffable beauty (cf. Gen. 1:31). By His restoration of man to the primordial state, the Lord will also restore nature to its primordial, sinless state (Rom. 8:21). Then not only will Christ-yearning people be "restored to their ancient beauty" (*Evlogitaria* of the *Pannikhida*), but also all of nature—by the action of God's grace—will throw away and cast off from itself all sins, all evil, all consequences of sin and evil, and with them death itself.¹⁷⁴

The Permanent Deification of Man and the Cosmos

But it was not only to restore what the first Adam had ruined that the Second Adam, our Lord Jesus Christ, came upon this earth. Christ also came to accomplish what the first Adam had failed to accomplish. Man, it will be remembered, had been created for deification. As St. Symeon the New Theologian writes, if Adam and Eve had not fallen, "the soul of each would have become brighter," and man "would have been led up in due time to a more perfect glory and transformation, drawing nearer to God and to the rays which spring from His Divinity."¹⁷⁵ As we have seen, through His redemptive work Christ has already granted to man the possibility to experience such a deification of

¹⁷³ Archimandrite Justin Popovich, *Orthodox Philosophy of Truth: Dogmatics*, vol. 3, pp. 795–96.

¹⁷⁴ Ibid., pp. 792–93.

¹⁷⁵ See p. 24 above.

soul in and through His Church—a deification that is to grow and become more perfect in the life to come. In the General Resurrection, however, He will do more than this: In reuniting man's soul with his body, He will grant an everlasting deification to man's body together with his soul, and along with man He will grant unending deification to the entire cosmos.

In the words of Scripture and their interpretation by the Fathers, we can find indications of how this will come to pass: The permanent deification of man's body and the cosmos will occur together with their becoming not only incorrupt but also *spiritual*.

The Apostle Paul writes: "So also is the resurrection of the dead. It is sown in corruption; it is raised in incorruption.... It is sown a natural body; it is raised a spiritual body. There is a natural body, and there is a spiritual body.... Now this I say, brethren, that flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God; neither doth corruption inherit incorruption. Behold, I show you a mystery: We shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed. In a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trump; for the trumpet shall sound, and the dead shall be raised incorruptible, and we shall be changed. For this corruptible must put on incorruption, and this mortal must put on immortality" (1 Cor. 15:42, 44, 50–53).

Explicating this Pauline teaching, Fr. Justin Popovich notes that the bodies of all people—both those that have died and those that are still alive at the Second Coming of Christ—will be changed in the same way. "Thus," he says,

all people will be made equal, all will acquire spiritual bodies, since natural bodies will be transformed into spiritual ones. And this transformation, this change of body, will occur "in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trump." How? By the power of the resurrected Lord Christ, for He by His almighty Divine power will lead out of death all the bodies of the dead, "and the dead shall be raised incorruptible": that which has died, that is, the body, will rise

incorrupt. That which comprises the essence of the body will rise incorrupt—that which makes my body mine, your body yours, his body his, each one's body his own. Although these will be "spiritual bodies," they will nevertheless be the same bodies that died and are now resurrected. The same thing will occur with those whom the General Resurrection will find living on earth—they will remain the same bodies, but they will turn from being physical to being spiritual. All this will happen in such a way that Peter will remain Peter in his body, Paul—Paul in his body, and Mark—Mark, likewise in his body.¹⁷⁶

How are we to understand the incorrupt and spiritual body of man beyond the General Resurrection, particularly in light of our discussion of man's incorrupt body before the fall? Earlier we quoted St. Symeon in saying that "Adam was created with an incorruptible body, though one which was material and on the whole not yet spiritual," and that, if Adam had not fallen, his "perceptible and material body" would have become "altered and changed into an immaterial and spiritual one, into something beyond sense perception."¹⁷⁷ We also quoted St. Maximus as saying that first-created man was, through living a life of virtue like that of the angels, to "become as subtle as spirit" and "no longer tied to earth by any bodily weight."¹⁷⁸ Here Sts. Symeon and Maximus are speaking of relative degrees of corporeality, for as we have seen the bodies of Adam and Eve in their original, incorrupt state, even while not having yet been altered to become spiritual, did not have the grosser materiality or "coarser flesh" that our bodies now have. St. Gregory of Sinai observes that our spiritual bodies after the General Resurrection will in fact correspond with the incorrupt bodies of Adam and Eve before the fall:

¹⁷⁶ Archimandrite Justin Popovich, *Orthodox Philosophy of Truth: Dogmatics*, vol. 3, pp. 797–98.

¹⁷⁷ See pp. 10, 24 above.

¹⁷⁸ See p. 33 above.

The body in its incorruptible state will be earthy, but it will be without humors and material density, indescribably transmuted from an unspiritual body into a spiritual body (cf. 1 Cor. 15:44), so that it will be in its godlike refinement and subtleness both earthy and heavenly. Its state when it will be resurrected will be similar to that in which it was originally created (cf. Rom. 8:29; Phil. 3:21) through full participation in His Divinity.¹⁷⁹

Man's body in the beginning, then, might be said to be "similar" to his body in the General Resurrection, in that both share the quality of incorruption. Nevertheless, it is only in the General Resurrection that human bodies will be perfectly and immutably spiritualized and divinized. The promise of this future condition is seen in the resurrected body of Christ.

When Christ rose from the dead, His body was like the spiritual body that Adam was *supposed* to attain by ascending to God in Paradise. As we know from Scripture, in His resurrected, spiritual body Christ left the tomb while a stone still sealed the door (cf. Matt. 28:2),¹⁸⁰ He entered the room of the apostles while the doors remained shut (cf. John 20:19), and He appeared and vanished at will (cf. Luke 24:31). Even so, in order to show His disciples that He was not merely a spirit but had risen in the same body that had been crucified, He permitted the Apostle Thomas to touch his wounds and ate in the presence of His disciples (cf. Luke 24:43). Blessed Theophylact of Ohrid writes of this mystery as follows:

This is how we must understand the body of the Lord after the resurrection: it is spiritual, refined, a stranger to all coarseness. It needs nothing, not even food, although the Lord did eat to confirm the

disciples' belief. He ate, not because His resurrected body by its nature needed food, but by economy, to show that His risen body was the same which suffered on the Cross. For this is the nature of the Lord's body now: to enter where doors are shut and to pass effortlessly from one location to another. Because the disciples still did not believe and had not yet been convinced even by touching His hands and feet, He offers yet another proof, that of eating. But what He eats is consumed by some Divine power, for all that is eaten in a natural manner passes from the mouth to the drain. But what the Lord eats here is not according to nature, as we have said, but by economy.¹⁸¹

Since Christ arose in a spiritual body, He will raise mankind in such a body at the last day: a body both incorrupt and spiritual. Furthermore, since the rest of creation exists for man, He will not only restore it to incorruption but will also make it spiritual together with man.

St. Symeon writes of this with illuminating precision. Having affirmed that all creation will be made incorrupt along with man in the General Resurrection just as it was made incorrupt with him in the beginning,¹⁸² St. Symeon goes on to say that both man and the rest of creation will also be made spiritual:

Together with [the creation] and at the same time, the corrupted bodies of men will be renewed, such that, himself having become at once spiritual and immortal, man may have an incorrupt, and spiritual, and everlasting place in which to dwell. Listen to the Apostle Peter for the truth of this: "The day of the Lord will come like a thief in the night, and then the heavens shall burn and be dissolved, and the elements shall melt away with fire" (2 Pet. 3:10). This does not

¹⁷⁹ St. Gregory of Sinai, *On Commandments and Doctrines* 46; cf. *Philokalia*, vol. 4, p. 221.

¹⁸⁰ As St. Matthew records, after Christ resurrected and left the tomb, an angel "rolled back the stone from the door, and sat upon it."

¹⁸¹ Blessed Theophylact of Ohrid and Bulgaria, *The Explanation of the Holy Gospel according to St. Luke* (House Springs, Mo.: Chrysostom Press, 1997), p. 324.

¹⁸² See pp. 49–50, 80 above.

mean that they shall be destroyed, but rather re-forged and transmuted into a greater and everlasting condition....

But now it is time for us to examine how creation shall be renewed and restored to its original beauty....

Just as our bodies, although they dissolve for a time, do not pass away forever, but will be renewed again at the resurrection, so, too, will heaven and earth and all that is within them—that is, all of creation—be made anew and liberated from the bondage of corruption. The elements themselves will share with us in that incandescence from above, and in the same way that we shall be tried by fire, so, according to the Apostle, shall all creation be renewed through fire....

However renewed, creation will not return to what it was created in the beginning. By no means. Rather, just as it is sown a “natural body,” according to the saying (1 Cor. 15:44), so it is raised a body, not like the first man’s before the transgression—i.e., material, perceptible, and mutable, needing moreover physical food—but instead a body wholly spiritual and immutable; such a body as that of our Master and God after His resurrection, the body of the Second Adam, Who is our “firstborn from the dead” (Col. 1:18). As His body was a far different thing than the old Adam’s, so shall the whole creation, in the same way and at God’s command, not become what it was before, material and perceptible, but be transformed in the re-birth into an immaterial, spiritual dwelling place, beyond any perception of the senses.¹⁸³

When St. Symeon says that our bodies and the rest of creation will be “immaterial (*ἄυλον*)” in the General Resurrection, he is again speaking of immateriality in a relative sense. The renewed creation will indeed be “immaterial” in comparison with its present state and even with its condition before the fall. However, it will not be entirely

¹⁸³ St. Symeon the New Theologian, *Ethical Discourses* 1.3–5; SC 122:204, 206, 212; cf. *On the Mystical Life*, vol. 1, pp. 35–36, 38–39.

immaterial, since according to St. Symeon and other Holy Fathers only God in Himself is wholly immaterial and uncircumscribed; in relation to Him, even angels and human souls possess a degree of materiality and are circumscribed by time and space.¹⁸⁴ As we have seen, the resurrected, spiritual body of Christ, to which St. Symeon likens man’s body and the whole cosmos after the General Resurrection, was not entirely without corporeality.¹⁸⁵

¹⁸⁴ In discussing the renewed creation, St. Symeon takes pains to say that it will not be entirely immaterial and uncircumscribed: “Now, then, try to imagine with me a world which is spiritual and rises beyond our sense perception. But, what is beyond sensible perception and spiritual is quite incomprehensible for us, and invisible.... It is in this sense, therefore, that we can discourse about the angels, i.e., that they are also, in effect, somehow embodied and circumscribable, at least when compared to the absolutely immaterial and bodiless nature of Divinity.... The same reasoning holds for the soul as well. Compared to God Who is by nature bodiless, and to the angels, the soul is as it were bodily and circumscribed.... For mortal perception, however, it is altogether bodiless and incomprehensible” (*Ethical Discourses* 1.5; *On the Mystical Life*, vol. 1, pp. 39–40).

St. Symeon’s mention (see below) of flowers and heavenly bodies in the renewed creation provides further clarification that he is not describing a realm without any degree of materiality. The Origenist idea that the creation after the General Resurrection will be wholly immaterial was in fact condemned at the Fifth Ecumenical Council: “If anyone shall say that the Last Judgment signifies the complete destruction of the body and that the end of all things will be a non-material nature, and that in the future age there will be nothing material, but only naked spirit: let him be anathema” (Eleventh article of the anathemas against Origen).

On the relative materiality of angels and human souls, see also St. Basil the Great, *On the Holy Spirit* 23, and St. John Damascene, *Exact Exposition* 1.13, 2.3.

¹⁸⁵ Since St. Symeon says the renewed creation will be “beyond any perception of the senses,” it follows that Christ’s resurrected body was and is “naturally” beyond sense-perception also. It was by Divine dispensation that Christ made His body perceptible to the senses of the apostles after His resurrection. As Blessed Theophylact points out in discussing Christ’s appearance to Sts. Luke and Cleopas on the road to Emmaus (Luke 24:13–32): “They were not allowed to recognize Him by the features of the body in which the Savior then appeared to them. For, as Mark says, He appeared unto two of them ‘in another form’ (Mark 16:12), and with different

Later in the same discourse, St. Symeon, having undoubtedly beheld something of the future age in prophetic Divine vision, speaks in more detail about the renewed creation as a spiritual dwelling place of man:

As I have said several times, all creation, too, once made new, will become wholly spiritual, and together with Paradise will be transformed into an immaterial, unchanging, eternal, and noetic dwelling place. The heavens on the one hand will be incomparably brighter, in a manner indeed quite new, different and more radiant than the visible heavens, while the earth on the other hand will take on a new and inexpressible beauty, an unfading verdure, ornamented by radiant flowers, varied and spiritual. It will be an earth in which, as the sacred word has it, righteousness will have its dwelling place (2 Pet. 3:13). The sun of righteousness will shine sevenfold more brightly, and the moon will gleam twice as bright as the sun which illumines it now (cf. Is. 30:26). The stars will be like our sun—if, indeed, these are the same stars as are spoken of in the sublime thoughts of the wise. All things there are beyond speech, transcend thought, save only that they are spiritual and divine, united to the intelligible world, and comprise another, noetic Paradise and heavenly Jerusalem, made like and united to the heavenly

world, the inviolable inheritance of the sons of God (cf. Rom. 8:21).¹⁸⁶

When St. Symeon says that all things in the cosmos, including man, will become “spiritual and divine,” he is referring to nothing less than their deification. Deified in both soul and body, man will freely experience God’s uncreated energy (grace) through his bodily senses. In the words of St. Gregory Palamas,

In the very blessed existence of the age to come, in “the sons of the resurrection” (Luke 20:36), who, according to the Gospel of Christ, will have received an angelic dignity, it will be the body which is as if hidden. With the victory of the *nous*, the body will become so subtle that it will no longer appear to be material, and it will no longer limit the activity of the *nous*. In this way, they will enjoy the Divine Light in their bodily senses.¹⁸⁷

From this Patristic testimony we see how, through Christ, man and the rest of creation will not only be restored to their original incorruption; they will also become what they *would have become* if the first Adam had fulfilled his calling from God. It will be remembered that, according to St. Maximus, man’s original designation was not only to become deified himself but also to bring the whole created universe into a state of deification, so that “the whole [would be] wholly interpenetrated by God.”¹⁸⁸ Further expounding St. Maximus’s teaching, Vladimir Lossky writes: “Since this task which was given to man was not fulfilled by Adam, it is in the work of Christ, the Second

features. He no longer conformed the actions of His body to natural laws, but instead acted in the body in a spiritual manner that was beyond nature. This is why their eyes were prevented from recognizing Him. Why did He appear to them in another form, and why were their eyes prevented from recognizing Him?... That they might believe all the more surely that His body is no longer a body that is clearly visible to everyone. Even though His resurrected body is the same body which suffered, He now appears only to those to whom He wills to reveal Himself.... He was seen by those to whom He wished to be visible” (*The Explanation of the Holy Gospel according to St. Luke*, pp. 318–19). In same way, following His ascension into heaven, Christ has miraculously appeared to people in His resurrected body at various times throughout Christian history.

¹⁸⁶ St. Symeon the New Theologian, *Ethical Discourses* 1.5; SC 122:218–20; cf. *On the Mystical Life*, vol. 1, p. 41; *First-Created Man*, p. 104.

¹⁸⁷ St. Gregory Palamas, *The Triads* 1.3.36; in *The Triads: Book One* (Chicago: Praxis Institute Press, 2002), p. 128.

¹⁸⁸ St. Maximus the Confessor, *Ambiguum* 41; in Louth, *Maximus the Confessor*, p. 158.

Adam, that we can see what it was meant to be.”¹⁸⁹ Thus, as St. Maximus writes in discoursing on Christ’s words, “My Father is working even now, and I am working” (John 5:17), it is in the work of Christ that we behold “the grace effective to deify the universe.”¹⁹⁰

All that has been described here—the immutable glory of the future age—has been made possible by the incarnation, death and resurrection of Christ. Through the totality of Christ’s work of redemption, man is spiritually united with God and deified; man can attain to Paradise and heaven after death; and, at the General Resurrection, man’s body and the entire creation are to be renewed as an incorruptible, spiritual and divine dwelling place.

VIII. THE ORTHODOX DOCTRINE OF PRELAPSARIAN INCORRUPTION AS IT RELATES TO ORTHODOX SOTERIOLOGY AND ESCHATOLOGY

From the foregoing discussion it can be seen how the Orthodox teaching on the original incorruption of the world has direct bearing on Orthodox soteriology. The Scriptural/Patristic doctrine that death entered the world as a consequence of man’s sin forms a foundation for the doctrine that the sinless Savior innocently took upon Himself that consequence—that is, by dying on the Cross—in order to “put away sin by the sacrifice of Himself,” to “bear the sins of many” (Heb. 9:26, 28), to *redeem* mankind from all the consequences of sin.

As we have seen, when Adam fell his corrupted nature, now diseased with sin, made him subject to physical death. All his descendants inherited that corrupted nature, and thus all were obliged to die. Christ alone, being totally sinless, was not obliged to suffer death; and therefore, in His voluntary death and in His resurrection which inexorably succeeded it, He destroyed death both spiritual and bodily. Let us recall the words of St. John Damascene quoted earlier: “Since our Lord

Jesus Christ was without sin ... He was not subject to death, since death came into the world through sin.” Yet “the Lord,” writes St. Gregory Palamas, “patiently endured for our sake a death He was not obliged to undergo, to redeem us, who were obliged to suffer death.”¹⁹¹

Here we see clearly how the *physical, causal connection* between Adam’s act of sin and the presence of death in the world forms the basis for understanding the physical, causal connection between Christ’s undeserved death and the overcoming of the consequences of sin in the world. As Fr. Seraphim Rose pointed out,

Christ’s death on the Cross was a real, physical event, not an image or an allegory; and at the same time it has spiritual consequences, bringing about a change in man’s condition. It gives us salvation: not figurative salvation, but actual salvation. In the same way, Adam tasted of a tree and thereby [fell into corruption]. This, too, was a physical event with spiritual consequences, changing man’s condition.¹⁹²

The Orthodox teaching on prelapsarian incorruption is also foundational for understanding St. Paul’s oft-repeated teaching—which we have seen elucidated by St. John Chrysostom¹⁹³—of sin and death entering the world through *one* man and then being overcome by *One* Man. St. John Chrysostom said that the truth that our redemption could come from only One Man is evidenced by the fact that the consequences of sin came from only one man. In fact, St. Chrysostom states that, in the fifth chapter of Romans, St. Paul repeatedly juxtaposed the “one” Adam with the “One” Christ precisely in order to demonstrate the reality of the world’s redemption by Christ—particularly to those Jews who believed in the Genesis narrative but not (yet) in Christ. For St. Paul as for the Holy Fathers, faith in the real Second

¹⁸⁹ Lossky, *Mystical Theology*, p. 110.

¹⁹⁰ St. Maximus the Confessor, *Ad Thalassium* 2; in *On the Cosmic Mystery*, p. 100.

¹⁹¹ See the full quotations on pp. 69–70 above.

¹⁹² Fr. Seraphim Rose, *Genesis, Creation and Early Man*, p. 216.

¹⁹³ See pp. 71–72 above.

Adam as the Redeemer from ruin cannot be divorced from belief in the real first Adam as the cause of that ruin.¹⁹⁴

Certainly, the Orthodox teaching on the original incorruption of *man* (specifically) is most germane to the Orthodox doctrine of redemption, since it was a man (Adam) who brought sin and death into the world, and it was a Man (the God-man Jesus Christ) Who overcame them. At the same time, however, this Scriptural/Patristic teaching cannot be separated from that of the incorruption of the rest of the cosmos before the fall, since as we have seen the visible creation was made for the sake of man, is dependent on man, and must be in the same condition as man. The incorrupt and potentially immortal body of man before the fall, as described in detail in the Patristic writings, could not have existed in surroundings filled with death and corruption; and hence it is to be expected that the *consensus patrum*, in accordance with Holy Scripture, holds that the cosmos was originally incorrupt as well.

¹⁹⁴ Besides the passages already quoted (Rom. 5:12–19, 1 Cor. 15:21–22), there are other places in the Pauline epistles where the Apostle writes of Adam and Eve, recounting the Biblical descriptions of their creation and fall: “The first man Adam was made a living soul” (1 Cor. 15:45; cf. Gen. 2:7); “the serpent beguiled Eve through his subtlety” (2 Cor. 11:3; cf. Gen. 3:1–6); “Adam was formed first, then Eve; and Adam was not deceived, but the woman being deceived was in the transgression” (1 Tim. 2:13–14; cf. Gen. 2:21–3:6). Again, referring to the creation of Eve from Adam, St. Paul writes: “Man is not from woman, but woman from man; nor was the man created for the woman, but the woman for the man” (1 Cor. 11:8–9; cf. Gen. 2:18–22). In keeping with the plain meaning of these passages of St. Paul, the Patristic commentaries on them assume a belief in an actual, historical Adam and Eve. See, for example, St. John Chrysostom’s commentary on 1 Timothy 2:13–14 (NPNE, 1st Series, vol. 13, pp. 435–36), where the Saint affirms the existence of Eve as a singular person, distinguishing between her and the female sex generally.

That Adam and Eve were real persons was affirmed by Christ Himself, Who said that the “blood of Abel,” their second son, was shed “from the foundation of the world” (Luke 11:51, 50; cf. Gen. 4:8). Christ also spoke of the creation of Adam and Eve, quoting from the book of Genesis: “But from the beginning of the creation God ‘made them male and female’” (Mark 10:6; cf. Gen. 1:27).

As the doctrine that man and the world were incorrupt before the fall is directly connected to Orthodox soteriology, so also is it connected to eschatology. It provides a basis for understanding the words of the Apostle Paul in the way that the Holy Fathers understood them: “For since by man came death, by man came also the resurrection from the dead. For as in Adam all die, even so in Christ shall all be made alive.... The last enemy that shall be destroyed is death” (1 Cor. 15:21–22, 26). It underpins the doctrine that Christ came in order to *give back* to man what Adam had lost at the fall, physically as well as spiritually, and that, through Christ’s death and resurrection, there will be a restoration, perfection, and spiritualization of the incorrupt first-created world. From St. Irenaeus in the second century, who said that creation will be “restored to its primeval condition” at the General Resurrection, to Fr. Justin Popovich in the twentieth century, who wrote that nature will then “begin to shine with its primordial sinless, immortal beauty, the same as it had before the fall,” we have seen the connection that the Fathers have drawn between the original and the final states of the creation. In the words of St. Gregory of Nyssa, the promise of the final state is predicated on belief in the original one, and vice versa:

Now the [General] Resurrection promises us nothing else than the restoration of the fallen to their ancient state; for the grace we look for is a certain return to the first life, bringing back again to Paradise him who was cast out from it. If then the life of those restored is closely related to that of the angels, it is clear that the life before the transgression was a kind of angelic life, and hence also our return to the ancient condition of our life is compared to the angels.¹⁹⁵

Highlighting this interrelationship between the original and final states of man and the cosmos, Fr. Seraphim pointed out that

¹⁹⁵ St. Gregory of Nyssa, *On the Making of Man* 17.2; NPNE, 2nd Series, vol. 5, p. 407.

the two correspond and only differ ... in that the future state of the world will be fully spiritual, corresponding to the “spiritual body” of the men who will dwell in it, and no longer will it be possible for its incorruptibility to be lost. Do we Orthodox Christians believe that we will *actually* be immortal and incorruptible in that next life—if God will only number us among the saved—or only metaphorically and allegorically so? If we believe and think as the Holy Fathers do, then our future incorruptibility will be *real*, as was that of the creation and of Adam before his disobedience.¹⁹⁶

Thus we see how our *belief* as Orthodox Christians is all of one piece. Our belief that death came into the world through human sin (Rom. 5:12) is linked with our belief that Christ the God-man has redeemed the world by means of His death (Heb. 9:15). In the same way, our belief that man and the cosmos were incorrupt in the beginning is tied to our belief that they will be incorrupt in the future age.

IX. CONCLUSION

A Summary of the Orthodox Teaching

In setting forth the Scriptural/Patristic teaching on the original state of creation and on the entrance of death and corruption, we have shown that the condition of man and the creation in the beginning was radically different from what we know today. Whether or not one views the original incorruption of man and the cosmos as being “according to nature” (depending on how one employs the word “nature”), it must be said that this incorruption was given and preserved by Divine grace. Man’s continuance in incorruption depended on the right use of his free will in following the commandment of God, whereas the continuance in incorruption of the rest of the cosmos depended on man. When man fell, sin infected human nature, corrupt-

¹⁹⁶ Fr. Seraphim Rose, *Genesis, Creation and Early Man*, p. 592.

ing it. Because of this corruption of man’s nature, grace withdrew from him. Man thereby suffered spiritual death (the separation of the soul from God), and this in turn made him subject to physical death (the separation of the soul from the body) and to physical corruption (decay) after death. In this way, man introduced death and corruption—not merely as a potentiality but as an actuality—into his own existence as well as into that of the entire cosmos, which depended on him.

We have further discussed how Christ the God-man, while being Himself wholly sinless, took upon Himself the ultimate physical consequence of sin—death—thereby overcoming all the consequences of sin. Through Christ’s death and resurrection, man is first resurrected spiritually through the life of grace in the Church; and later, at the General Resurrection, he will be resurrected physically as well, being restored to the incorrupt state he enjoyed at his creation. Since the rest of creation was made for man, it too will be restored to incorruption. Moreover, at the General Resurrection both man and the cosmos will be spiritualized and deified, thus reaching the state that was ultimately intended for them.

The Personal Relevance and Application of This Teaching

Having examined these doctrines in some depth, let us now consider how they can inform our attitude and perception of ourselves, of our fellow human beings, and of our natural environment.

Without the Orthodox Christian understanding of the origin of death and corruption, those who believe in God may be inclined to blame Him for the many forms of suffering that arise in this fallen world, as well as for the deaths of loved ones. On the other hand, those who do not believe in God may point to the broken aspects of creation as “proofs” that there is, in fact, no Creator. For us Orthodox Christians, however, the true reason for the corruption of creation has been explained long ago in the Bible and in the writings of the Fathers. We recognize that suffering, illness, death, and decay—together with all

the other manifestations of corruption—were not part of God’s original “very good” creation. They are present because *man* brought them into the world through his sin.

An awareness of what was in the beginning and what occurred at the fall, then, can serve to uphold our faith in the face of both the hardships of life and the attacks of unbelievers. Far from blaming God or doubting His existence when confronted with suffering and death, we can see these realities as signs of God’s mercy. As we have seen from the Patristic writings, although God did not create man and the cosmos corruptible, when man sinned He *allowed* death and corruption to enter the world in order to serve for man’s benefit. Death prevents sin from being immortal, while the sufferings incurred in man’s corruptible state serve to blunt his pride and irrational love of sensual pleasure, and to point him back to the true Source of his life, which is God and not the world. Thus, the consequences of sin are at the same time therapeutic correctives against sin. Through hard experience coupled with faith, we can learn to accept these correctives with thankful hearts, realizing they are given to us for our healing and salvation.

Furthermore, understanding the full effects of the fall can help instill in us greater repentance for our sins and greater compassion for the creation. Although we do not bear the guilt of the fall of our first ancestors, still we participate in the sins of the family of Adam, having been born into this world with a corrupted nature that inclines us toward sin. Thus, when we see brokenness in our fellow human beings or in the material creation, we should recognize that we ourselves are enmeshed in that which, in the beginning, brought about this universal state of corruption. This realization can, in turn, inculcate in us compassion for God’s creation in its brokenness.

In contemplating the incorrupt cosmos that was in the beginning, as well as its restored and perfected state beyond the General Resurrection, we can also become aware of God’s plan for His creation, His economy. In this way we can grow in spiritual knowledge of created things according to God’s intentions for them, and at the same time

harbor a more vibrant hope in the future renewal of the cosmos, when God’s plan for it will have been fulfilled. As we have heard from the teachings of St. Barsanuphius of Optina, we can still find “delights and consolations” through beholding the “fragments” that remain of God’s original handiwork.¹⁹⁷ However, it is only by being cognizant of the original and final states of creation that we can appreciate the beauty that God created in the beginning, unmarred by human sin, and the corresponding yet even greater beauty that is to come. Such an appreciation can help us to apprehend spiritually what St. Maximus has called “traces” of God’s majesty in the sensible creation,¹⁹⁸ and through them be led to a deeper knowledge of our Creator.

Finally and most importantly, understanding what was in the beginning and what occurred at the fall can fill us with a more fervent gratitude toward our Lord Jesus Christ, Who both restores what the first man lost and brings into being what the first man was meant to attain. As we have seen, it is only by recognizing that death entered the world because of sin that we can fully appreciate why the sinless Christ *died* for the salvation of the world: why He undeservedly took upon Himself the final physical consequence of sin in order to overcome all the consequences of sin, “trampling down death by death”¹⁹⁹ and giving life to the world. In knowing *why* He did this, we can give more fitting glory to Him for having, with His death on the Cross, “offered one sacrifice for sins forever” (Heb. 10:12), and for becoming, in His resurrection, the “firstfruits” of our rising from the dead (1 Cor. 15:20, 23).

To Him—through Whom man and the visible creation were made incorrupt in the beginning and are to be immutably returned to incorruption, made spiritual, and deified—is due glory forever. For “Behold,” He says, “I make all things new” (Apoc. 21:5).

¹⁹⁷ See p. 31 above.

¹⁹⁸ See p. 19 above.

¹⁹⁹ From the Paschal troparion.